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HENRI QUATRE, KING OF FRANCE

Translated from the German, by
ERIC SUTTON

HEINRICH MANN

HENRI QUATRE

KING OF FRANCE

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BOOK ONE
LUCK OF WAR

THE RUMOUR

THE King had won his victory. He had flung the enemy back and laid him low. But he had not destroyed the mightier power nor brought him to a stand. His kingdom was still in deadly peril ; indeed, it was not yet his. It still belonged to the League ; for the lawlessness of those days, the common defiance of decency and of reason, had risen to very madness. Worse even than madness, a dull subjection to disorder and unreason had laid hold upon the people, and they had sunk into a melancholy acceptance of their shame.

The King's one victory could not alter their condition. One fruitless, solitary success—how much of it was accident and how much was destiny ? It brought no change of heart to what was still the stronger side. And yet this Protestant from the South was no bandit captain, he was the veritable King. What, then, were all the great leaders of the League ? they who each ruled a province or a county, in their very persons and in full authority. The King's writ barely ran save where his army lay. The idea of the kingdom stood for the King ; so much was recognized by many, to their disquiet and regret. An idea is both less and more than actual force. The kingdom was more than a territory and a domain, it was the very essence of freedom and of justice.

If eternal justice then looked down upon the earth, she must have seen a sorry sight of humiliation, and, what was viler still, of hypocrisy and self-betrayal. Frenchmen who, to serve the needs of every day, had subjected themselves to the traitors, and were like, through them, to pass under the sovereignty of Spain. From mere fear of their fellow-men they endured serfdom in their own land,

spurned the spirit, and flung away the highest treasure of all, freedom of conscience. Poor noblemen serving in the armies of the League, or holding the offices of State, worthy citizens who trafficked with it, and humble folk who joined it; not always fools, and often not dishonourable. But what could they do? A whisper among trusty friends, a secret prayer to God, and after the King's unlooked for victory at Arques, hearts leapt with hope that the day might not be far off!

Strange it is that people at a distance mostly conceive a larger notion of events than those near at hand. The King's victory was won beside the North Sea; and within a compass of two or three days' journey, men might well have marvelled. In Paris, most of all, they should have searched their hearts and rid them of their abiding errors. Far from it. Up in the North, as the scattered bands of the League's great beaten army overran the countryside, many saw with their eyes what did not penetrate their heads. For them, the League was still unconquered; the King, thanks to the sea-mist, and a turn or two of luck, had possessed himself of an insignificant strip of territory, and that was all. But for the inner provinces the hour seemed indeed about to strike. By the Loire and in the city of Tours they believed, from ancient experience, that in the end the King would always come among them in person. Time and again as a poor fugitive, but at last as their master, thus had they received him for centuries past. As for the outlying domains of the West and South, they viewed the battle of Arques as though it had been refought and won before their very eyes, and decreed by Heaven itself. The stormy Protestants of the fortress of La Rochelle sang: "Let God, the God of Battle rise!"—the very psalm with which their King had conquered. From Bordeaux slantwise across the land, the whole South afire with enthusiasm, conceived as accomplished what was far from done; the subjection of the capital, the punishment of certain powerful traitors, and the glorious union of the Kingdom under their own Henri, who had

been born among them, had marched out thence, and was now so great.

Did his countrymen in fact go farther than the rest? Great!—it was easiest to call a man so, who was not even known by sight. His southern countrymen knew from their own encounters that he was of no more than middle height, wore a felt hat and a threadbare doublet, and was always in need of money. They remembered his kind eyes; did these really bespeak a cheerful humour or much grief endured? Well, he was a man of ready hand, and understood how to deal with common men—and better still, he understood the ways of women. Many of them, none could tell how many, held his secrets. And, usually so garrulous, they did not tell them. Enough; here he was known by sight, though they had not indeed been with him in the North, among the sea-mist, when, to the strains of the great psalm, the attack was made and a mighty army routed. That was a great deed done, and heaven and earth had held their breath the while.

And now far-off lands had learned of what was going forward. Hitherto no news of him had reached them. At great distances so new a fame is a vision of pure glory. Thus he loomed all the greater when he suddenly appeared. The world was waiting for him, sick of the incubus of Philip of Spain: the tedious, dreary Philip. The burdened world had long yearned for a deliverer; behold, he is here! His victory, a trifling battle, no shattering blow that changed the face of Europe, and yet, more significant than had been the defeat of the Armada. Here had a man by his own strength dealt a blow at the throne of the Ruler of the World that set it rocking. And that shock, faint as it was, was felt across the frontiers, across the mountains, and beyond the seas. In a famous city over the great sea they were said to have carried his portrait in procession through the streets. A doubtful portrait. Faded, discovered in a dealer's shop, and cleaned: The King of France! cried the populace, and marched off

behind it, even the priests marched in their ranks. Rumour knows everything, and is winged.

THE REALITY

He himself held no celebration of victory. A task brought to fulness leads on to another, and he who has not conquered by guile, but in open fight, knows nothing of victory and feels none of the dazzlement of joy. The King thought only of taking his capital of Paris by surprise, before the Duke of Mayenne with the beaten army of the League could reach it. The King was the quicker of the two; moreover in Paris they let themselves be persuaded that he had been beaten by their beloved Mayenne, and was in full flight; which gave him yet more start. But before he arrived in Paris, the citizens had recovered their nerve and had set about providing for defence—though in very clumsy fashion. Instead of manning the massive walls and bastions round the inner city, they decided to hold the outlying wards as well. This was much to the mind of the King, who thought to overwhelm them outside, and then to dash through the gates with the fugitives.

He stormed the outer works with ease, but in the meanwhile there had been time to shut the gates. And so it was that his troops,—Switzers, German *landsknechts*, four companies of adventurers, four thousand Englishmen, sixteen French regiments—plunged into a welter of butchery and pillage. Otherwise, nothing came of the assault. The King was indeed received with plaudits, but the pillage and the butchery went on. He cannonaded over the walls into the city, but knew he would not win his capital that time. So he retired to rest in a palace called after his family: Petit Bourbon. Henri had to force his way in like a stranger, and indeed found nothing to lie on but fresh straw. There were three hours left for sleep, and part of them he passed in meditation.

. . . In the city stood the palace of the Louvre, there he had endured as prisoner through many profitable years, he bore the mark of them yet. Was he never to see the city again as a free man and a King? On a certain night of Saint Bartholomew nearly all his friends at Court had fallen; and in the city, most of his fellow-believers. After eighteen years they were avenged! At one single cross-road his soldiers had that day cut down eight hundred of the enemy, crying out as they did so: Saint Bartholomew! How terrible it was that all things are fated to return, and nothing can be banished from the world. He would be for forgetting and forgiving, he would be for humanity. Where lay the truth in those old conflicts? Who could tell? What remained certain was that killing still went on, without as within. If only he had reached the gate in time! he would have shown them a merciful conqueror and a true King. The kingdom would have had its capital, and the citizens could have looked in peace upon an end achieved. But no: only a little sated vengeance, the usual slaughter, and the luck of war.

Henri, a man of thirty-six, who had behind him much horror and much patient toil, though his natural gaiety had indeed brought him many joys, lay on fresh straw under a huge refectory table. For the last time he sat up—to command that the churches should be spared—“and the men too!” he shouted to his captain. Then he really fell asleep, for he had learned self-mastery, in failure and disheartenment not less than in times when Fortune smiled. Sleep was his good friend, appeared punctually, and mostly brought what Henri needed—not fears, but visions of good omen. In his dream that night Henri saw ships passing by. They hovered first in the haze of the horizon, grew larger and set forth on the sunlit sea, great galleasses full of power and glory: they came nearer, they bore down upon him. His heart began to throb, and the sleeping man grew aware of what that visitation meant. There had been talk of such matters after the battle he had won. He had not listened, because of the many urgent tasks that

lay to his hand. One does not listen to fairy-tales at such a moment. But when he awoke after his three hours the vision of the ships had quite vanished from his memory.

All Saints' Day dawned ; the Royal army, all of it that was Catholic, went to the churches in the outer city. Behind the walls they had not the heart to celebrate the feast, they lamented their dead and feared for their own lives. But towards evening they were saved, for the League troops appeared, and the King could not now prevent them occupying the city from the further side ; the moment had passed. He allowed one more abbey to be taken by his men, and three hundred citizens of Paris were cut down. That was his farewell, and a sorry one, as he himself was well aware. He paid for it too ; to get a view of the city he mounted a church tower, taking a monk as his guide. Alone with the monk on the narrow roof he shuddered suddenly, as he thought of the late King, who had been murdered by a monk. He himself had often seen a knife peeping out of the sleeves of a habit. Quickly he stepped behind his companion and grasped both his arms. The man, though tall and powerful, made no movement. Henri did not look upon his capital for long ; on the way down he made the suspect walk before him, he himself remained several steps behind. At the bottom he met Marshal Biron. "Sire," said Biron, "your monk took to his heels and fled."

At that moment came a roar of joy from the people of Paris. Their commander, Mayenne, had appeared in person ; his troops were feasted in the streets. Next day the King drew up his army in battle order, and gave the enemy three hours to come out. In vain, Mayenne was too wary ; so the King withdrew. On his way, he took some fortified places ; but some of his regiments, their pay being in arrears, broke up. With his remaining troops, the King rode to his city of Tours, there to receive the Ambassadors of Venice. The ancient Republic had sent her ships from far away, the rumour had proved true.

The mission had landed, and while the King was taking certain towns, they rode slowly through the kingdom on their way to bring him homage.

A FAIRY-TALE

He learned daily of their approach, and grew disquieted, so he pretended to be gay. "It is raining! The wise men from the East will get their incense wet!" He was really afraid that the League might capture them and snatch them from his grasp before they could arrive, with all the honours and all the visible glories that they meant to lay before him. While they were still several days journey from the Loire he sent a body of troops to meet them, ostensibly as an escort of honour, but in fact with more serious intent. Then he awaited them in his castle at Tours, and he had to wait some while. One of the elderly Venetian gentlemen had fallen ill on the way. "It is a very old Republic," said Henri to his diplomat, Philip du Plessis-Mornay.

"Sire, the oldest in Europe. Once one of the most powerful, but now the most experienced. He who speaks of experience does not usually know that he means decay. But to those who now approach, that too is known. Now pray consider the event! The most astute of Governments, concerned now only to carry the frailty of age with dignity and postpone the hour of dissolution, she has the most sagacious observers at all the Courts and is most assiduous in reading their reports; suddenly she rises up and acts. Venice challenges the World Power, and offers you her homage on your victory over it. So it was indeed a mighty victory!"

"I have begun to ponder on my victory. Victory, Monsieur de Mornay——" began Henri; then he stopped, and fell to pacing up and down the stone-flagged hall of the castle at Tours. The companion of his youth watched;

and he felt, as he had so often done, that he had chosen his Prince aright. He gave God alone the honour for that victory. The stern Protestant doffed his hat as the thought was born into his mind. There he stood, a man of forty years, in dark array, with a plain white collar after the fashion of his fellows in the Faith, a Socratic mouth and chin, and a high forehead, very smooth and polished with reflected light.

"Mornay!" cried Henri, facing him. "Victory is not what it used to be. We have both known it otherwise."

"Sire!" answered Henri's envoy, in clear unruffled tones. "In your former dignity as King of Navarre you brought to reason certain obstinate and misguided cities. Ten years of toil and striving, and a notable battle, which fame has celebrated, made you heir to the Crown. The King of France, as you now are, will fight with less toil, will win greater victories; and fame shall, on his behalf, flap her wings with even more ado."

"If that were the only difference! Mornay, since my victory, which has brought the Venetians hither, I have besieged Paris and had to raise that siege. Don't the Venetians know that?"

"It is far to Venice, and they were already on their way."

"They could turn back. They are sensible men, and must know what it means when a King has to besiege his own capital, and even so cannot take it. Butchery, pillage—and retreat, after I had looked down upon the city from a tower, in fear of assassination by a monk."

"Sire, the luck of war."

"So we call it. But what is it? While I am watching one gate, Mayenne enters by another. He approached by the bridge; by my orders it was to have been cut, but had not been. Such is the luck of war. I have a suspicion that matters scarce wear a different aspect when I win."

"Sire, the handiwork of man."

"None the less, there should be commanders," Henri

broke off: he thought of one commander, called Parma, who, by the reputation of his art, relied upon no luck of war, nor excused himself by talking of man's handiwork.

"Mornay!" cried Henri, as he grasped his counsellor's shoulder and shook him. "One word! Can I win? My duty is to save this kingdom; but my mind was more at ease when none were making their ways hither to pay me homage before the time."

"Venice regards you as having conquered, Sire. She would not recall her ambassadors even if your army were utterly broken up."

And Henri answered: "So I am to believe that fame is a misunderstanding. I deserve it, and yet I get it without my own desert." Whereupon his face changed, he swung round on his heels, and with an air of high good humour he greeted some persons who at that moment entered. Several of his most trusted followers, elegantly arrayed in new clothes. "Bravo, de le Noue!" cried Henri. "An iron arm, and you swam across the river. And bravo, Rosny! Your jewels come from good houses, though not from your own; I wonder how much money you found and pocketed in the outer wards of Paris. Suppose I appoint you my Minister of Finance instead of that fat rascal d'O?"

He looked about him, for they barely smiled. "Gloomy faces, gentlemen,—above all things do I fear them and mistrust them."

They were silent. He looked from one to another until he guessed. His old friend d'Aubigné nodded—d'Aubigné, once his fellow prisoner, and afterwards the companion of his campaigns, a bold man and a pious, in verse and in deed. The kindly face nodded and said: "Sire! It is so. A messenger, all wet, arrived, when we had already arrayed ourselves for the reception."

A quiver shook Henri. He let it pass. And when he had completely mastered his voice again, he said to his old friend genially: "What would you have, Agrippa? It is the luck of war. The ambassadors have turned back.

But they may yet change their minds, for I shall soon fight another battle."

A hubbub could be heard outside the door, which was then thrust open ; between two guards appeared a dripping messenger, out of breath and speechless. He was put in a chair and given a cup of wine. "It is a different one," observed d'Aubigné.

At last the man spoke. "In half an hour the ambassadors will be here. "

As Henri heard this, he clutched at his heart. "Now I'll let them wait till morning," And he hurried away.

Now overnight a miracle happened, November changed to May. A soft breeze blew up from the South and banished all the clouds, the blue canopy of heaven shone down upon the park and the river, winding its way through the meadowland in the heart of France. The birches stood up tall and almost leafless ; from the castle the ambassadors could be seen disembarking from the ships in which they had crossed. They were lodged in garden-houses on the further side. Under tall windows level with the ground the Court awaited them ; gentlemen and ladies as richly clad as they were able, or thought decent. Roquelaure was the most elegant. Agrippa wore the largest feathers, Frontenac stood in rivalry with Rosny, who carried on his hat and collar more jewels than were sewn into the women's dresses ; though his still young, smooth face bore its usual air of understanding gravity. When the King's sister entered, she appeared at once as the loveliest woman of that company. The delicate fair head poised against the high lace collar sewn with diamonds ; and her air of courteous decision only masked a childlike humour that she would never lose. She was still in the doorway when her gold-embroidered veil caught on some projection ; or it may have been her lame foot that played her false. The entire Court stood arrayed to welcome her, when at that same moment she saw her brother approach through the opposite door. A little cry of joy—and heedless of herself, she ran a few tripping steps towards him. "Henri !"

They met in the middle of the room. Catherine of Bourbon bowed the knee before her brother—they had been playmates in their childhood, and they had travelled through the land in heavy antique coaches with their mother Jeanne. Their dear mother had indeed been sick and restless, but how strong in virtue of the faith she taught! Her cause had triumphed in the end, though she had been fated to die first, poisoned by the wicked old Queen, and much terror and much toil had been their lot. However, now there they were, standing in a hall in the very heart of the kingdom, the King himself with his sister, about to receive the ambassadors of Venice. "Kathrin," cried the brother with a gush of tears, lifted his sister from her curtsy and kissed her. The Court joyfully applauded.

The King in white silk with a blue scarf led the Princess by her trembling hand; the Court fell back but closed their ranks again behind the royalties. They halted under the tallest window, and the company thronged round them—those who thrust to the front were not always the most considered. The sister said in her brother's ear: "I don't like your Chancellor Villeroy. And still less your Treasurer d'O. And you have worse than those about you. Dear brother Henri, if only all who served you might be of our Faith!"

"I would it were so," he said in his sister's ear, and therewith he beckoned to the two courtiers she had named. She turned away in disgust; and the further she went, the kindlier grew the faces that she met. By the wall, Catherine came upon a bevy of old friends: her brother's companions in arms, cavaliers of the former Court of Navarre, though in those days coarse leather doublets had been their usual garb. "You have indeed made yourselves very splendid, gentlemen! Baron Rosny, when I taught you to dance, you had no diamonds. Monsieur de la Noue, your hand!" She took the Huguenot's iron hand—not the living hand, the iron one, and said, for him, and Agrippa d'Aubigné, and tall Du Bartas, alone to hear;

"God had but to let a single grain of sand fall otherwise than on its natural course,—and we should not be here. Do you know that?"

They nodded. On the darkened face of tall Du Bartas could be read the verses that were forming in his brain; then came a blast of trumpets from without. They were at hand! The company hurriedly stiffened into the presentment of a powerful Court. Most of the faces assumed an air of grave magnificence, tempered by curiosity; rigid and straight they stood, even the Princess of Bourbon. She eyed the women, of whom there were few to be found in that wandering Court and camp. With a quick decision she took one hand, and came forward with Charlotte Arbaleste, the wife of the Protestant Mornay. There followed a sudden pause.

There had no doubt been some misarrangement of precedence in the procession of the envoys. The trumpets had sounded too soon. The path up the river-bank was steep, perhaps the gentlemen from Venice were too old to climb it? It seemed as though the King made merry, those around him were all laughing. The Princess, his sister, led her companion to another window; she had been startled, for beside her Royal brother stood Soissons, whom she loved. . . . It was fortunate she had this stern Protestant on her arm, thought Catherine, as though she had not been one herself. Indeed, she forgot herself, as she did all her brief life long, at the unexpected vision of her cousin. Her heart throbbed, her breath came in gasps, and in self-defence she assumed her haughtiest expression, but she scarce knew what she was saying to her neighbour. "Palpitation of the heart," said she; "Madame de Mornay, have you not suffered from that affection? In old days in Navarre, when you had dealings with the Consistorium on account of your lovely hair?"

Charlotte Arbaleste wore a coif that reached almost to her eyes—limpid, shining eyes that knew no awe of men. And the virtuous wife of Protestant Mornay answered: "I was accused of immodesty because I wore false curls, and

the Pastor forbade me the Lord's Supper. And he refused it to Monsieur de Mornay. And even to-day, after so many years, all those troubles have left me a flutter at my heart."

"How unjust our Church can be," said the Princess quickly. "You endured banishment and poverty for our Religion, after your escape on the night of Saint Bartholomew. All of us here, now awaiting the ambassadors, were once prisoners or exiles for the Faith. You yourself, Monsieur de Mornay, the King my brother, and I also."

"And you also," repeated Charlotte, her bright limpid eyes looking straight into those of Catherine, who trembled in disquiet. No use for her to talk, that she realized. The woman saw through her.

"But despite the Pastors, you kept your red curls for a long while," poor Catherine persisted. "And rightly, say I. What? Persecuted and exiled, and when you came back, your sacrifice rejected, just because of your hair."

"It was wrong," confessed the Protestant's wife. "I was immodest." Wherewith, by admitting her own transgression, she really reminded the Princess of herself and her more heinous fault. She made this quite clear. "My immodesty was not merely venial; it was deliberate, and despite all warning. But I received the light through prayer, and at last laid aside the evil thing, since when I have worn a modest coif."

"And suffer from palpitations of the heart," said Catherine. She glanced angrily at the other's face, now pale and drawn and pious. In earlier days, when Charlotte was pretty, they both went to balls together, thought she. This banished her wrath. Pity possessed her—pity that soon turned to penitence. She still looked as she had looked then—and so did her sin. She knew herself, and had learned many things, but was incorrigible; there would be no pardon for her, she thought ruefully. "Lord help me, that I too may put on the coif this evening and wear it forever!" She prayed in a low and urgent voice, though with little hope of being heard.

The Count of Soissons stood before them, and said : "Ladies, His Majesty desires your company." Both bowed their heads obediently, both in silence. He took their finger-tips, and led the ladies by their lifted hands. Gently he tried to press his cousin's hand. She did not respond, and kept her face averted. Courtcously he handed her to her Royal brother.

Among the birches could be seen a metallic glitter ; the thoughts of all turned to weapons and to war. But the ladies knew the flash of jewels : or, at the least of embroidery. Such, indeed was what they saw, and yet more sumptuous and surprising visions : a ship of silver that floated, or seemed to float, towards them, ahead of the rest of the procession which was just coming into view. The silver ship was so large that people could have gone aboard,—and, indeed, hands were setting a sail, but they were children's hands. The ship was manned by children, in sailors' garb, and singing sailors' songs to a tinkling accompaniment ; but whence it came, and how that magic ship was moved, none could tell.

Twenty paces from the castle it stopped, or rather, it was set down, and from beneath the rich fabrics hanging from its bow sprang forth dwarfs, who had been carrying it. Humpbacked dwarfs, dressed from head to foot in red, who promptly took to their heels, amid the laughter of the Court. Meantime a sort of chair was seen approaching—no, it was a throne. Moving just above the level of the ground, it then rose upwards, only the most elaborate machines could so noiselessly uplift it ; and behold—it was a throne. The sparkling air rippled over the fair hair of the lady there enthroned, her blonde head piled high with tresses and huge pearls. The throne was tapestried in purple, and the woman—a proud creature in golden draperies, like a painting by Paolo Veronese—who could she be ? Her eyes hidden by a black velvet mask—who could she be ? The whole Court fell silent. The King bared his head, and so did all the rest.

By the side of that lofty throne walked, or rather marched,

certain stark figures in black cuirasses, arrayed in dark and motley colours, their uncovered heads a tangle of red or black hair. But they were recognized by their formidable teeth : Slavonians, conquered subjects of Venice. They were followed by fishermen, true sons of the sea city, unkempt, with patched clothes and splintered oars, as they had been taken from a canal bridge. They sang—in high, clear voices, and there was little mystery about what they sang, though few understood their speech. Into that gay singing came a graver note, that carried to the listeners the vision of a church : the distant shimmer of a church across the waters.

The singers broke off, in the middle of a rhythmic cadence, for the lady on the throne stretched out her hand. It was a wonderful hand, a shapely hand with pointed fingers slightly upturned. Hued like a rose-leaf, it wore no rings, and beckoned in imperious but alluring fashion, as though to a suitor whom so great a lady was graciously admitting to her arms. The Court realized that the ambassador was at hand ; and the King of France went out alone on to the terrace to receive him.

At the same moment the fishermen fell back from the throne and knelt. The warrior Slavonians also moved aside and knelt. The children knelt in the silver ship, and the red dwarfs beneath the bushes in the distance. The space about the throne was empty, and across it came a slender figure in a robe and barret ; a scholar, as the Court conceived. Why a scholar ? Did the Republic send a scholar as her highest representative ? The two others, grey-bearded captains, gave him precedence.

Agrippa d'Aubigné and Du Bartas, two humanists, who bore many scars on their bodies from battles new and old, took hurried counsel, while the ambassador came very slowly towards the King. Monsieur Mocenigo, a kinsman of the Doge and himself quite old : he had fought at Lepanto, the famous sea victory over the Turks. Now he taught Latin at Padua, and hence had first become known in Christendom. "What an honour !" said the poet Agrippa

exultantly. "Monsieur Mocenigo to pay homage to our King ; I'm so overjoyed that I could write a poem about the battle of Lepanto as though had I been there myself."

"Write a poem about our next battle," said the tall Du Bartas grimly. "I'll be mum," he muttered to his own foreboding heart.

The King was again wearing his feathered hat with up-turned brim, but his unshadowed eyes beneath it were wide open that they might lose nothing. But he was moved, and perhaps the tears had come into his eyes ; it was indeed for that reason that he kept them so wide open, and his eyelids were as rigid as his hand or foot. The ambassador bowed his head on his chest in salutation to the King. Then he raised it once more, and for the first time it could be seen that one eye was closed, and barred by a red scar.

He began to speak in marvellously cadenced Latin—smooth, but hard. The Court thought of marble. Then too the man's face could be seen for what it was—its bony contours, sharp and sunken mouth, like the busts of Dante, the face of an old sage. The Court did not understand every sentence, for the familiar speech came from foreign lips. But they observed from the orator's expression that their King was being highly lauded ; measured by the pattern of the Roman commanders, and found worthy of their company.

Henri, and he alone, grasped every word, not merely what was actually said, but what lay behind it : which was this. . . . Your cause is at issue. Who are you ? That you may learn from this harangue, or think you may guess while it is uttered. The one-eyed sage appears to be comparing you with the first conqueror of the kingdom, the Roman Caesar, your predecessor. But he is in truth warning you to remain what you have always been, a horseman bold and debonair, great in little things, unequal to high deeds. You know whom he thinks a better man than yourself : his countryman, Farnese, Duke of Parma,

the most celebrated strategist of the age. And you are no strategist, merely a rough and daring horseman. . . .

He began to grow uneasy, and opened his eyes yet wider. The stranger, who had so curtly acquainted him with the truth, now for the first time looked in earnest at that face. It was thinner than at first glance ; its very gauntness stamped it with ardour and devotion ; the ambassador had not thought to look on such a face. He broke off his harangue, and clasped his hands.

When he resumed, his voice had softened and mellowed ; and he uttered but a few words more, the chief of which was love. . . . Though a man were rich in art and victory, and had not love. . . . The Gospel in place of Caesar ; which was quite unlooked for, and surprised everyone, most of all the speaker, who thereupon closed his address. Then Henri too did something unexpected. He did not, as had been arranged, give his hand to the ambassador, to invite him up on to the terracc ; he himself leapt down, gave him the accolade, kissed him on both cheeks, and the Court applauded. The children in the silver ship saw it, and so did the throned woman in the golden draperies, —and as she was the daughter of one of the fishermen in patched clothes, she forgot her majesty and clapped her hands. The warrior Slavonians clapped their hands likewise, so did the fishermen and the two grizzled captains.

Henri looked about him and laughed joyfully—although a strange shudder quivered through his shoulder. Not as when the murderer had stood behind him—no, this time it was the faint flutter of a wing. Fame had brushed against him, for the first time, for he was nearly forty, —fame that was true fame. In aspect like an Eastern fairy-tale, it had passed in a flash, leaving a shudder of fear behind it.

“ Master Ambassador, when the ceremony is over, I want a word with you alone.”

“ On what matter, Sire ? ”

“ The Duke of Parma.”

THE HERALDIC BEAST

I must have my battle, thought Henri, almost before the Ambassadors of Venice had departed ; indeed he had so determined when they appeared with such display. That odd premonition of fame had likewise shown him how he stood. A commander of his sort has no money, and if his army is not to melt away, he must take a city as often as he can ; to raise pay for his soldiers. They were the cities of his kingdom ; it was a hard matter to remain the father of his country and beloved as such, while he ranged the land subduing his enemies and collecting contributions. Not a week had passed since the festal fairy-tale at Tours, before he was plunged in the struggle once more.

He cleared Touraine as well as the neighbouring provinces of the enemy, and then marched into Normandy—but his victory at Arques was won on Norman soil. What had been the issue of that victory ? The conquered places he had left behind him had in the meantime fallen away. His enemy was not a man, like himself, but a many-headed hydra. Cut off seven and eight grow in their place. So was it with the League. His subjects all thronged the streets to welcome him, when he rode among them as their master. Never had they dreamed of bearing weapons against him—though he had merely to dig up their gardens to find the buried muskets. All of which would have been good entertainment, had he been made to spend his life in such fashion. And if in truth he were not made for such a purpose, but for something greater, he had better keep his mouth shut.

“ My health is as good as it has ever been,” he said to everyone that winter, when snow fell often and many nights were spent on frozen ground. “ And there’s no disease in my army, which will soon be greater still, for this wretched little town alone is paying me sixty thousand crowns. Will you wager that the next one will surrender by Thursday ? ”

He did indeed make such a pact with the town of

Honfleur. If Mayenne or his son, Nemours, had not arrived by Thursday, the gate was to be opened, and so it came about. Mayenne, the leader, was content that his League should be a league and took his ease in Paris, "as I shall do in days to come," observed Henri confidently. But in his own mind, he thought: I must have my battle. And he pondered it in alternating mood: now as a swift and joyous stroke, now as the decision of his life.

In his baggage he carried a singular object, an alarm clock, which he kept in order most carefully. He spent less time in sleep than did the fat Mayenne at table. Which was a new thing for a man of his hearty temperament; and sometimes he missed even those few hours . . . I must have my battle,—and not as in other days, when I could win or lose. This one I may not lose, or all will be at an end. There are too many eyes upon me, the world is watching me,—my allies, who paid me homage before the time had come, but especially the King of Spain, who wants this kingdom. And he would have it, the moment I were no longer there. There's none to prevent him. The nation is at odds over religion. If all of them had the true one, then Don Philip could do nothing. Meantime—what care I? Every man has his own, I am a Huguenot and I lie on frozen earth. If Don Philip comes, and if he comes in power—'tis all one whether my religion is the right one; creed makes no matter here, it is the kingdom that's at stake, and that, whatever may befall, is from God. The game is played between the Almighty and myself. . . . So much was very clear to the King, on a pitch black night, while in his tent a night-light sputtered and at last went out.

The alarm clock struck; the King rose and called for his officers. On that day there was much to do and far to ride. A moat had to be drained, so that the besiegers could press up to the walls of the fortress. This done there was much desultory cannonading, until the early evening. Henri had long been a-horse, over other matters that took him far afield. He was very hungry when about

dinner-time he reached the town of Alençon, and drew up with a small escort at the house of a certain captain, who was very much his servant ; but the man was away. The King was not known to the wife ; she took him for one of the Royal commanders, and received him as was his due, but also with marked embarrassment.

" I fear I am unwelcome, my good lady ? Speak freely, I would not embarrass you."

" Then I'll tell you, my lord. To-day is Thursday ; I have sent all over the town ; there's nothing to be had, and I'm in despair. Only a worthy mechanic nearby tells me he has a fat turkey on a hook ; but he'll not give it up unless he sits down to table too."

" Is he fit for company ? "

" Yes, my lord, he's the merriest fellow in our quarter. A decent man too, fire and flame for the King, and with a prosperous little business."

" Then let him come, dear lady. I have a rousing appetite ; and were he tedious, I would sooner cat with him than not at all."

Whereupon the mechanic was fetched, and appeared in his Sunday attire, bearing the turkey. While it was roasting he entertained the King, though he did not indeed appear to recognize him, or he would scarce have talked so freely—such gossip, jests and sallies, and all so good that Henri forgot his hunger for a while. He very soon dropped into his companion's tone—without intention, and did not notice it himself. It was no hard matter to remain father of his country and beloved as such, while he compelled his subjects to obedience and levied contributions from them. The whole secret was his good conscience, born of the honourable task he had in hand. To bring his countrymen to reason and save the kingdom without flurry or guile. This thought was always in the forefront of his mind, in sleep and even in cheerful talk. The worthy mechanic opposite was telling him tales, but he too did not forget his workshop.

The King thought : . . . I must have my battle. It

is not now far away. I have taken enough strong places to make my fat friend Mayenne uneasy. My cousin, Marshal Biron, is harrying the League, and I have all our successes reported to the Queen of England. We will now besiege the town of Dreux ; Mayenne can't look on at that, he must advance and offer battle. Indeed the Spaniards will insist on it. That is the sole purpose of the Spanish auxiliaries, the first that Philip has ever granted to the League. They are from the Netherlands, sent by the Governor, Farnese. Am I never to get a sight of him, the great strategist, the most famous artist of war ? I wonder what Farnese says about me ? . . .

As the name came into his mind Henri instinctively leapt to his feet. The mechanic kept his mouth open. But Henri was able to repeat the story the man had been telling. "When the glove-maker found the tall farrier with his wife, he stretched out his hand in forgiveness and said : 'Of you, friend, I cannot believe such a thing.' " Henri laughed ; "A merry tale, brother."

"Merry indeed, brother," repeated the worthy fellow, relieved of his disquiet at his companion's wild demeanour. At that moment the hostess called her guests to table. All three sat down to the great bird, but hostess and mechanic ate with reserve, the guest was given the larger portion ; and so hugely he ate, and so heartily he laughed at his neighbour's stories, that the worthy mechanic grew droller than ever. So it was all the more singular, after the last glass, when they were about to leave the table, to see his plump face lengthen and his eyes close in fear. The King had indeed taken it for a jest, but there lay the man at his feet, pleading for pardon : "Forgive me, my lord, forgive me ! This has been the greatest day of my life. I knew Your Majesty and have served you, and fought at Arques for my King ; and now I have had my desire, which was to sit at table with your Majesty. Forgive once more, Sire, I had to feign to be a fool that you might laugh a little at my jests. And now the dreadful thing has happened, a menial like myself has sat at dinner with the King."

"What are we to do about it?" asked the King.

"I see but one way."

"Well?"

"You must ennoble me."

"You?"

"Why not, Sire? I work with my hands, but I carry my sense in my head, and in my heart—my King."

"Excellent, my good friend, and what would be your blazon?"

"My turkey. I owe it all the honour."

"Your neatest jest. Rise, Knight of the Turkey."

A ROMANCE OF CHIVALRY

The new knight took care that his exploit should be talked about, and do much good to the King among his people. At last a good fellow like ourselves! Not proud, nor aloof, although as a heretic his damnation was surc. Why, the King's heresy would even be accepted, so far as it was God's intention. Would God let him conquer?

The King asked himself that question also. He had made no such careful preparations for any of his battles. He raised the siege of Dreux, withdrew his troops from every side, and allowed himself to be forced to the frontier of the province of Normandy; but not within it. He halted at Ivry, in the Ile de France, the vital point that covers Paris.

The Duke of Mayenne had believed that this time his superior numbers would suffice, and that a battle would not be needed. The Spanish general, Farnese, Duke of Parma, by Don Philip's orders had had to hand over to him the flower of his army, six thousand musketeers, twelve hundred Walloon spearmen; in all, there were twenty-five thousand men under Mayenne's command. What could avail against all these, a King without a country, with an army scarce a third as large, and faced by the

regiments of Spain? These were the as yet unconquered arms of the World Power. But the King halted at Ivry.

It was the twelfth of March of the year 1590. That day, and the night that followed, Henri spent quite otherwise than was his wont before a battle. He did not ride from company to company, to hearten them, nor did he bear a hand at entrenchments. There were none, and none were dug. A broad stretch of country, a little river, on the further side of it an army thrice his own; and on the hither side a man with a plan ripening in his mind.

He lay on the ground, drawing plans. His marshals, Biron and Aumont, did not recognize him, so possessed was he by the thought of Parma. The famous commander had not come in person, the issue did not seem important—not yet: Don Philip would send him later as his last resource. Pray God it might be so. Lord! We call upon Thy name!

Henri also prayed. As often as he rose from his plans, he exchanged his strategic ambitions for the devotion of one who stands under the highest arbitrament of all. He prayed with his troops, he even gave orders that those of the other religion should be allowed to receive the Sacrament in their churches, and many did so; the churches round about were full. Most of the men, regardless of their creed, wanted to hear the King utter a prayer;—and this he did, in the midst of a throng of troops, with face upturned above them towards the flying clouds, as though he were committing to Him Who sits enthroned on high all that moves man's heart below. But the heart was his own, and its throbbing shook his chest. Hence his voice carried further than ever before. Then it failed in the stress of his emotion, or was carried away by the wind. His Huguenots in the front ranks knelt, bowed their weather-beaten heads, and if the tears came, they let them fall.

After this intercourse with Heaven, Henri was especially cheerful, and inspired everyone with his confidence. And this indeed received its due in the domains above the clouds; for Huguenots came continually riding in from

far away, to help win the battle. In the night it rained, which was to the disadvantage of the enemy : the Royalists lay in the villages. In the morning the King drew up his forces in accordance with his plans : Mayenne, who was watching from beyond the stream, marvelled at the ease of these manoeuvres. It was but the thirteenth, and Mayenne did not want to give battle so soon. The gamecock yonder should be discomposed by waiting ; raiding horsemen wasted his precious time ; a Swiss Colonel caught under an apple tree, and a handful of *landsknechts* captured. So in the evening the gamecock had to unman his elaborate battle array, which had served no purpose.

The fourteenth. Patiently Henri drew up his line once more : the cavalry of Marshal Aumont, those of the Duke of Montpensier, his own in the centre, then Baron Biron, the old Marshal's son—and every mounted unit carefully secured by infantry, French regiments, Swiss regiments, and even *landsknechts* from across the Rhine. All together they made no more than six or seven thousand men on foot, and two thousand five hundred mounted : in close formation as they stood, the enemy from a distance took them for even fewer. The enemy, on the other hand, lengthened out his line, so to make play of his superiority in numbers. Great as this was, it had in the meantime lessened. First, because new arrivals were continually joining the King,—the new Knight of the Turkey, and many of his sort, who came because they trusted Henri, and likewise at the bidding of their consciences. But on the other side, many had of late deserted the League—not alone because of the rain and other hardships, but also from naked fear. They had discovered, none could tell how, that the King was going to win the fight.

He himself held fast to reason, and did but hope that God would do so likewise. Between nine and ten his battle order was arrayed as on the day before, though slightly slanted with an eye to the wind and sun, and the smoke from the arquebuses. Henri moved about in the mood of ethereal exultation which always came upon him before

his battles, when prayer was over and only the fight remained. Indeed it was marked by all as an omen of victory. A poet among his officers, Du Bartas, eight years older than Henri of Navarre, the companion of his youth through many ups and downs,—the night of Saint Bartholomew, the long captivity in the Louvre, the battles, the victories, the ascent of the throne, the shifting luck of war—Du Bartas, a tall, dark-faced man, who thought more of death than life, and as time passed, still less of life and even more of death ; he saw Henri in that hour. And again he looked at him with utter love, and with as strong a faith as long ago in their youth, when they had ridden in a long cavalcade, stirrup by stirrup, through the land. Huguenots—to their winged spirits this land was holy, they held themselves ready to encounter the Lord Jesus in bodily guise at the next turning of the ways, and indeed they would have hailed him—Sire ! They would have followed him and won his victories. And all this came back into Du Bartas' mind, as he watched the King at Ivry.

Henry stopped, for the man's eyes held him fast. " Well, we are to fight for the Religion once more," said he. " You were always troubled, Du Bartas, over the blindness and the wickedness of men. Will our victory and kingdom teach them a lesson, do you think ? "

" Perhaps," said that foreboding heart. " I hope so. Those, at least, that are called to see the victory in the eye of God. Sire ! You must give me my discharge."

" No," said Henri sharply, lowering his voice. " This should be a piece of life,—old friends, the time of joyous darkness. I would not miss it nor lose it. Stay with me, whatever else becomes of me. Du Bartas, a while ago I sent you secretly to the Courts of Europe. What did I pay you for your journeys ? "

" A hundred and fifty crowns the first time, and eighty-five the next."

" Next time you shall be governor of a great city."

" 'Tis no matter now," said Du Bartas. " Lord ! To-day I still serve you, to-morrow someone greater. I have

indeed composed the song you shall sing, in thanksgiving for victory." And he gave the King a parchment. "Indeed it is not mine but yours, invented and composed by you yourself. And you are to proclaim it, that in your fame something of me may yet survive upon the earth."

Here they were interrupted, not altogether to Henri's displeasure. It was in fact the Swiss Colonel Tisch, who came about his men's pay. Just before the battle was the right moment. No sooner did the King see him, than he burst into a tirade—making indeed more of it than he really felt, that his wrath might put the money out of Tisch's head. The Switzer's face grew purple and he kept his lips firmly closed, or he must have answered the King's onslaught. Henri watched him as he marched off in his great boots, and reflected that it was too late for the Switzers to desert him then. They would have to fight, and would fight all the better, as plunder was their sole hope of getting paid.

But without the resolve to fight nothing can be done. The other Switzers, yonder with the enemy, who also had not been paid, knew moreover that the King of France was the ally of their Confederation; and they did not mean to strike a blow in that battle. They had so sworn; and since both, Henri and Colonel Tisch, knew this, neither master nor man was seriously perturbed. They were to win that battle. Henri had thrust a gigantic plume of white feathers in his hat, and another such nodded from his horse's head. He rode down the front of the line and cried: "Comrades! God is with us, yonder stands the foe, and here your King. At them! And if your standards go down, mark my white plume, you will find it where victory and honour lead the way!"

He rose in his stirrups, and behind that lean face and those flashing eyes came the thought—that his hat was indeed worth looking at! It had cost a hundred crowns, with the white amethysts and the pearls. The plume was not included. . . . And the Swiss would fight. . . . Then he noticed that the enemy army was in motion, led

by a monk, who had promised the Leaguers that the heretics would flee at the sight of his great cross. Henri, with the order to attack upon his lips, during that last minute galloped along his line till he reached his Switzers. "Colonel Tisch!" He embraced him from horse to horse. "I did you wrong, but I will make all good."

"Ah, Sire! Your graciousness will cost me my life," retorted the old Colonel. Then they parted, and each galloped ahead of his own men against the enemy line. The first to strike it was Marshal d'Aumont, who drove in the enemy light cavalry. But the German horseman promptly threw back the King's squadrons in disorder against the infantry, which made much confusion among the Royalists. To add to the disaster, Count Egmont with his Walloons fell upon the Royalists, who were thus faced with Spain and the House of Hapsburg; for they had never seen so close into the eyes of the invincible World Power. Terrible it was, and that first unlucky clash might well have led to rout and ruin. One Royalist cried to another before the mellay swept him away:

"Well, old heretic, who wins the battle?"

"It's lost for the King. Pray God he be not killed!"

Rosny, usually a dashing horseman, took no more favourable a view—he had five wounds already, from pistol bullets as well as swords and lances; he conceived he had done enough, slipped out of the turmoil and found refuge under the hanging branches of a pear-tree. A man so full of wounds was deaf to the noise of battle, and Rosny, later known as Sully, promptly fainted. Nor was he awakened by any thunder of cannon.

As in his other battles, the King had the cannon in his favour, and he knew how to make good use of them. The enemy guns fired over his head, his found their mark. The first to turn and run was the too sanguine monk. Now the army of the League was compact with superstition and false foolhardiness; when the lies that puffed it up were blown away, the heart was gone from out of it. This was the achievement of the King's cannon. In a flush

of fury Count Egmont rode in a mortal charge against those guns ; he thrust the hind-quarters of his horse into one of the fire-belching tubes, by way of insult to what, in his opinion, was the weapon of heretics and cowards. And indeed it belched no more. Instead, the King's horsemen fell upon the unsuspecting enemy and cut them to pieces, including Egmont himself. The Duke of Brunswick fell in the attack of his German horsemen, who promptly fled. Henri ! In press and tumult do not fail to notice that the flying Germans have crashed into their own front, which has begun to waver towards the right.

A moment—beyond mark or measure ; miss it, and it is gone. The King halted, he stood up in his stirrups. But as though the moment must indeed be measured, he felt for his watch, but he had lost it : eighty crowns, and a moment that could not be measured. His plan was otherwise ; truly had the ambitious strategist never designed nor purposed what he was now about to venture. A glance behind him, where silence had fallen, a sudden, utter silence : " Turn your faces to me ! And if you will not fight, then see me die ! " He dashed forward about two horse-lengths, plunged wildly into the forest of enemy spears, seized them with his hands, and held the enemy until his horsemen could come up. He held them not only with his hands, he showed them his face, which spoke of majesty and power ; of other things, perhaps, at other times, but here only of power and majesty. First their humiliation by the monk, then their terror of the guns, and now the face of the King. They had missed the moment—all those Spaniards and Frenchmen, and the German riders. The Royalists were on them, cutting them down and bursting through the shattered line of the once dreaded enemy. A rider brought the King back his watch, which was indeed surprising, and said in so doing : " Sir ! Less than a quarter of an hour ago we were defeated."

" Spare all Frenchmen ! " shouted the King after the pursuers. The Switzers of the League surrendered, they had not struck a blow. The King himself, at the head

of but fifteen or twenty horsemen, pursued a throng of more than eighty fugitives. When he pulled up, he had killed seven with his own hand and taken a standard. Where he halted, ended the battle and the victory of Ivry. The King dismounted and knelt. He flung his hat upon the ground. No one else should now follow that great white plume, he longed to be alone and far from all his fellows; but from every side came the noise of the now scattering struggle. The King, on his knees, drew from his doublet a sheet of parchment, the song of thanksgiving written by his old comrade, Du Bartas.

Far away, Mayenne, of the House of Lorraine, leader of the almighty League, strove, corpulent as he was, with the two surviving members of his suite, to collect some sort of force. Far away too, in another direction, awoke a sorely battered horseman—who was one day to become the famous Duke of Sully—from his fainting-fit beneath a pear-tree.

Rosny felt his limbs and his members, not one of them was whole,—swords, pistols and spears had done their work upon him, and he had also fallen with his horse; his first horse, when its belly had been slit; of his second he had lost all recollection. Wherever he touched himself he came upon dried blood. I must look horrible, thought the Baron, who was much attached to his smooth face. Dusk was falling. His sword in fragments, his helmet battered, he made an effort to get out of his cuirass, but the dented iron hurt his bruised body almost beyond endurance. "Hey, arquebusier, whither so fast? Come—fifty *talers* for that nag you're leading by the rein. But you will have to help me mount."

Scarce had the fellow taken the money than he ran. The rider, swaying in his saddle from loss of blood, hunger, thirst and weakness, missed his direction and strayed over the battlefield; he fell in with some enemy horsemen, their standards starred with the black crosses of Lorraine. He supposed that the battle had been lost and they meant to take him prisoner.

"Who goes there?" cried one of the noblemen of the League.

"Monsieur de Rosny, in the Royal service."

"What!—why we know you. Permit us, Monsieur de Rosny, to introduce ourselves. Will you have the courtesy to take us prisoner against a ransom?"

"What! . . ." he too began. But the word "ransom" promptly cleared his head. Five wealthy noblemen, and each one ready to pay according to his value. Rosny grasped the position. Beneath his pear-tree he had been unwittingly transformed into a conqueror.

SONG OF THANKSGIVING

In the meantime his King knelt upon the battlefield, his only company over a wide compass being the dead, lying in heaps or scattered singly, and darkness was about him. His horsemen of the last encounter had left him, for they observed that he was reading from a paper, and his lips were moving. Night fell; he put the paper away, it indeed contained a song of thanksgiving—but it sounded to him too vainglorious, and also too sad. His own thanksgiving to the Lord was to conceive Him as the God of Reason—God is always on the side of reason, said Henri, on his knees there after the battle; and later on, erect upon his throne, he said no less.

His enemies had poor swollen heads, full of lying and deceit; and so they failed. They made boast of a power and a glory far beyond their claims: hence the anger of the Lord. Their creed was surely false, if only because it was theirs; and the reason of God was against them, being arrayed on the side of the kingdom.

Such was his confession of faith, and it rang clearer to his inward ear than ever before, in the shadowed stillness of a deserted battlefield. Wherefore, for the first time, he was touched by no sympathy for the fallen. A thousand must have been cut down, certainly five hundred taken

prisoner, and how many had been drowned in the river—who could tell? Meantime the Lord's patience had its limits. They would drop all their baggage, but Henri and his men would be at their heels, and however light they travelled, the Royalists would be in Paris before them this time. . . . Grant this, O Lord, for Thy patience has its limits. . . .

Such was his supplication after the victory; nor did he, as was his habit, shed tears over each of his slain countrymen. But evil was truly beyond all pardon, as Henri felt most deeply at that moment, and he would have had fat Mayenne hanged. . . . Now, in the distance, a few lights were moving from place to place. The King approached his noblemen, who were looking for their own dead among the corpses. "That is Monsieur de Fouquières," he suddenly observed. "He should not have fallen, I had still need of him."

They told him that the dead man had left a wife, who was expecting a child.

"I'll give his pension to the child she carries," said the King.

They carried the lanterns from corpse to corpse until they reached that of Colonel Tisch. The King recoiled and covered his eyes. If only he had not embraced him! They had ridden to the attack just afterwards, it must have happened then. He meant to make too high a payment for his master's favour. "My Cross of the Holy Ghost for my brave Switzer," said the King, and was about to take it from his breast. But there was no cross there, it had been lost in the battle, and no rider brought it back. The King bowed his head, stricken by his own helplessness. . . . They depart, and he had nothing to send after them. What did they care now for his brief victory, when they were sitting at the seat of eternal victory. . . . Suddenly he recalled the whole song of thanksgiving, as he had read it by the falling light, and found it too vainglorious and too sad. But he felt his heart contract with pain.

Quickly he snatched a lantern from one of those about

him, and hurried on until he found the dead man whom he knew that he must find. He could not weep, for the pain that gripped his heart. But he moved the lantern back and forward over his old comrade as he lay there, and held his hands to see whether there were any last message in those broken eyes. None. Of course there was none. . . . Indeed he was but one of several who had ridden in that train of horsemen many years ago. There were enough Huguenots left. But this one meant to go—why? Had the hour struck for Du Bartas? How stood it then with Henri?

By way of answer to the questionings of his agonized heart, he announced to his noblemen that they would sing a thanksgiving to the Lord, and he would sing it to them first. Then he recited it to a psalm tune, very simply and in an undertone. The others knew the tune, and all hummed it together.

Now Lord and God, cometh at last the day;
In human guise, compact of earthly clay,
Thy loved Son, in a chariot of fire,
Descends awhile to us and these dominions,
In love and justice; while the angel choir
Circle the starry vault with whirring pinions.

O glory of the battle we have won;
For God hath sent to us his only son,
That we might see the victory in His eyes.
My Christ and King, now Thou art Lord below,
Let me go whither I have longed to go,
And stand before the Throne of Victories.

When the King had finished, he was weeping bitterly, though no one had really understood what he was saying, Indeed the last few lines were scarce heard. The pious humming of the noblemen had drowned the words.

In the village tavern there was high rejoicing, but a few left the revelry and waited outside for the King, as he came back from the battlefield. "Sire! Your orders!"

"We start for my capital before dawn."

"Sire, your fame indeed demands it. . . ." "This

time nothing and no one shall withstand you. . . .” “The gates shall fly open before you.” These utterances, from various lips, were rapped out in sharp succession, as had been arranged. Such was the King’s impression, especially when this sentence reached his ears—“A great and victorious King will never abjure his religion.”

Henri glanced from one to another ; and in their eyes there was mistrust of him and his constancy. He had long known it, and he had understood that many a man was secretly wavering because he thought his master was so. He could best conceive of this from his own anxieties and doubts. Again the contraction of the heart that had come upon him as he stood by the body of his old comrade. “God permits the Huguenots to conquer, my lords,” he spoke with majesty and force. “The Lord my God hath taught me to respect both creeds, and to be true to mine.” It was just that of which he was no longer certain—and he was convinced as he looked about him that several of the Protestants who heard him disbelieved his words. Except Mornay. His virtuous Mornay, his Ambassador, that astute man of affairs, who had damaged his enemies by his despatches no less than by a cannonade ; Mornay believed in his good faith. But how could he know what the King did not know himself? Strange it was that the virtuous Mornay’s confidence annoyed Henri, and he turned away. At that moment someone said :

“Sire ! Paris is worth a Mass.”

The King swung round ; the speaker was a man by the name of d’O, just O, and looked as much, a corpulent youth, whom the favour of the late King had turned into a drone and a thief : one of the adventurers who had divided the land and its revenues between them. For that very reason Henri had allowed him to remain what he was, Treasurer of the kingdom. It was a business that could best be managed by such as meant to make a profit on it ; and he was saved the trouble of persuading honest men into the needful devices. As the King’s questioning gaze fell on Mornay, the latter said :

"All honourable Catholics serve Your Majesty."

Henri had made the very same answer to d'O and his satellites, when they first urged him to abjure his religion. This had happened at the deathbed of the murdered King, and had been a perilous warning. However, Henri himself had then used the words, and now his Mornay had uttered them again that day. But he slipped his arm through Mornay's, drew him aside and said in an undertone :

"Were we fighting for the Religion ? Was this the best of our battles ?"

"It should be," replied Mornay. "Sire, you no longer have the right to risk your life as you did to-day, when you dashed on to the enemy spears. It was the bravest folly of your life."

"And how should we stand now ? What words are these, Mornay ?"

As the King came among the revellers, the laughter and the shouting were stilled. The feasting and the wine-cup were put aside, all stood up, and with their eyes upon the King they struck up the song of thanksgiving. It was the same that Henri had first sung on the battlefield, with but a few companions round him. These had marked it carefully ; especially Agrippa d'Aubigné, the King's old friend. A stocky figure, he drew himself up to his full height, and sang in resounding tones. Quite distinctly too he brought forth the last lines, which Henri had but muttered, or even swallowed.

My Christ and King, now Thou art Lord below,
Let me go whither I have longed to go,
And stand before the Throne of Victories.

Agrippa's naturally bold and humorous face here became so expressive that the King was left in no doubt. Their old friend Du Bartas had shown the song of thanksgiving to both of them before he fell. Someone said :

"That is the song composed by the King."

"Yes," said Henri, as his departing friend had bidden

him do. He spoke under the bold and humorous gaze of Agrippa, who nodded. But Henri felt it was not true—nor anything else that was happening in that place. Only in outward aspect was this like the Huguenot victories of old days.

A FEAST WITHOUT GUESTS

The march upon the King's capital did not proceed as quickly as had been ordered. Even a conquering army falls into some disarray, all the more when there is much booty to be taken, and a fleeing enemy to be pursued in all directions. The King could only wait until his commanders had got their men in hand again. Meantime he recovered from the strain of battle by the aid of hunting and of love. Of the latter he had for some while been deprived. It was indeed the essential force within him, as the Venetian ambassador had recognized at once. In all that he had done the deep-set impulse had been sex, and the heightened energy born of its enchantment. After the battle, the enchantment persisted, and Henri thought of his women, of those once loved and lost, and of those whom he had looked on and desired.

He wrote letters to Corisande—the Muse of his journey towards the throne. Her face had grown blotched, he was ashamed of her, and glad that she was in the South, a hundred miles away. None the less she lay before his senses as happiness possessed, and once again he wrote to her whom he no longer loved, the Countess of Gramont, letters in which he showed himself a master of romantic adoration. For the heightened vigour of the ecstasy born of sex had made him also a master of his pen.

She who had once been Corisande saw through his self-deceit. She had long known herself deceived. She wrote bitter comments in the margins of his lively letters, which she hated for their very liveliness : her life had no place in them, only his battles, his murderers, enemies and

victories, his tremendous hopes, and his kingdom. In days gone by, whether he remembered it or not, it was agreed between them that she should stand upon a balcony and be the first to greet him when he rode into his capital. Faithless creature ! he had flung it from his mind. She picked up a pair of scissors and drove it through the letter at the place where he had signed his name.

He was impervious. In those days he even wished the Queen of Navarre were with him, but had to take his pleasure quickly with any passing adventuress whom he happened to encounter. In his youth he had most often possessed his Queen, and what was more—in disaster, and in mortal need. In those days she stood by him, despite the many men she had preferred from time to time ; she stood by him, saved his life, and followed the fugitive to his land of Navarre. Never again, Margot ? . . . And when my fortunes rose, you became my bitter enemy, raised troops against me, and would do so again, had you any money left. But you sit alone in your bleak castle, hating me. I would love you again and love you always, Margot of the night of Saint Bartholomew. . . . So thought he after Ivry ; and Marguerite of Valois, in her bleak castle, smashed most of her majolica when she heard of his victory.

The castle of the widowed Countess de La Roche-Guyon stood in Normandy ; not far for Henri to ride, and he rode thither often after he came to know the Countess. Until the battle of Ivry he had almost always gone by night, for work and fighting kept him busy in the daytime. In the grey dawn he would appear beneath her windows, she stepped out on to her balcony ; he in the saddle, and she at a safe height, would converse for a while. He told her she was beautiful, as beautiful as the fairy Morgana, if indeed that fairy was more than the figment of a dream. But here above his head the dream appeared in bodily form, a fair-haired lady, tall and lissom, and her flesh, were a man allowed to touch it, would not dissolve into air in fairy fashion.

To which Antoinette replied with gallant banter to the

same effect. She would let her floating draperies slip apart, then wrap them round her, while she could make her blue eyes look grave or roguish, mocking or very still. On each occasion, that astute and highly honourable lady gave her fiery lover hopes. But when his brief interlude was over he had to ride away without ever having been admitted. Her excuse was that it was still night. Now his toil was over, that should avail no more. Soon after Ivry he announced that he purposed coming at high noon. "We have sniffed at the lily long enough, 'tis time for Antoinette to confess a little love for Henri. Dear lady ! My body is quite whole again, but my soul will never be disburdened until you have leaped the fence. Dear heart, do not delay ; love me as one who will worship you until the grave. In true token of which I press a thousand kisses on your white hands."

Thus he wrote ; but later, when all was long past, and he had never possessed Antoinette, he felt no regret, neither for her resistance nor his devotion. Indeed, from respect for her virtuousness, he promoted her Lady of Honour to the Queen.

He paid that promised visit, like all the others, alone and unattended. She feigned astonishment, received him half-way down the outer stairway, and led him within to a table, which had been set for at least twenty people. Mystified at first, he looked enquiringly for the other guests. She laughed, so that he could not but understand how he stood with her. Whereupon he recovered his wits, and requested that the lackeys, who were arrayed against the wall, should hand the dishes to the invisible guests. She dismissed the lackeys, and he promptly repeated what he had written about sniffing at the lily and leaping the fence, but in rather more gallant and expressive fashion than he could do in the best of letters. Truly she need fear no faithlessness, she had his word,—and his heart went with it.

"Sire ! Worship until death ? I am young, and would not see you die because you no longer worshipped me."

They were seated alone at the long table with the twenty covers. The calm and watchful look masked the lovely delicate face once more, and the lady spoke :

"I jest, Sire, because I am afraid ; as one might sing in the dark. It was much harder to win the battle of Ivry, than a victory over a poor solitary woman."

Then he fell at her feet, kissed her knees, and besought her humbly. But she was firm : "My House is not great enough for me to be the King's wife, and too great for me to be his mistress." As he persisted, she pretended to retire to her room, but left the house by a doorway at the back, and got into her waiting carriage. Before Henri noticed her absence, she was saved.

He had, while searching for her, gone through several rooms. In the last, a door opened, and someone came towards him. Just before they met he recognized his mirrored image. It would not commonly have misled him for so long, but he was confused by the lady's demeanour. "Well met, old friend !"—and he waved at the mirror ; what he saw there stirred the suspicion that the lady might in truth have run away from him because he was no longer young enough for her. It was his first suspicion of the kind. A shock, a searching gaze, and then a burst of laughter, because, as often and often, a man is bemused by his own heart, and by the enchantment of sex that heightens energy. But what could avail against sunken cheeks, a greying beard, and that deep furrow from the root of the nose up into the wrinkled forehead ? Indeed he laughed deliberately, that he might see the tension in the lifted brows, and the sadness in the wide eyes.

Why so sad ? he wondered in all seriousness. Deep within me I am gay ; and they all enchant me. . . . He meant women, the whole sex. She had found his nose too large, he decided ; too curved, and drooping. It was ridiculous on so thin a face as his. At the end, he came to the conclusion that he must take more trouble "with them" than he used to do. The easy luck of youth was past. What else was changed he did not observe. "Henri !"

said the Countess Antoinette at that same moment, and the creaking of her coach on the rutted road covered up her cry, and what she suffered. . . . Henri ! Had you not been the victor of Ivry. Sire ! I should have encountered you when you were an unknown Prince, when in the forest you found a charcoal-burner's wife and made her happy. You had the tapers put out at a ball, and in the darkness took the one you wanted. I would have been she. All would have been over and forgotten, and you would have been gone long since. Now it is your notion to endure ; a faithful lover, it was to be seen upon your forehead, my Henri, and I read it beneath your brows. I would gladly follow you everywhere, except into your greatness and your fame. Forgive me ! Your too bright light would fall upon me. Sire ! For ten years long you would promise to marry me and never do it. . . . "Drive back, coachman, at a walk." He had surely gone by now. She wept.

AN EASY QUESTION

Hunting had to console Henri for this failure ; and as he was galloping with horses and dogs across a plain, at the end of which stood a castle-crowned hill, what did he see ? A most curious procession climbing the hill—very slowly, so that the huntsmen easily caught it up ; "Hollo, fellows, what may this be ?" Ahead walked two great horses with slit hides.

"Sire ! They are Monsieur de Rosny's chargers. The largest was his first at Ivry. It fell under him, and we caught it later on."

"Why is the page carrying a suit of armour and a white banner ?"

"It is Monsieur de Rosny's page carrying the chief standard of the Catholic army, captured in the battle. The other page is carrying Monsieur de Rosny's shattered helmet and a splintered lance."

"Who are those behind them ?"

"The one with the bandaged head is Monsieur de Rosny's equerry ; the other on the English palfrey is his chamberlain, dressed in his master's orange and silver cloak, and in his hand the trophies of victory, swords and pistols, which Monsieur de Rosny broke and captured in the fight."

"But in the centre, on the litter ? "

"Sire, Monsieur de Rosny."

"I hope all is well with him, indeed he could scarce otherwise have given himself so splendid an ovation," said Henri, turning to his suite. Then he asked another question : "Who are those riding on donkeys behind the litter ? "

"Sire, those are the noblemen whom Monsieur de Rosny took prisoner."

"No doubt they are discussing the luck of war. And what are you doing at the rear of the procession ? "

"We are Monsieur de Rosny's servants, and are following him to his ancestral castle. Yonder rides his banner-bearer with his company of guards, and two companies of mounted arquebusiers. More than fifty are missing, and those that survive have bandaged heads and arms."

Henri felt like laughing at this pompous display ; but ought vainglory to be derided when it lies upon a litter ? He rode up ; the litter was constructed of branches and barrel staves, but upon it were the gorgeous mantles of the prisoners, black silk and richly embroidered with the silver crosses of Lorraine, and their battered helmets with black and white plumes. And among them all lay, triumphant, but sadly damaged, the cavalier himself.

"My good friend," said Henri cordially, "I congratulate you. You look much better than might have been expected. Is there no broken limb ? We cannot have you left a cripple. There are hair-raising stories told of your adventures."

At these simple words, the excellent Rosny's self-complacency faded and was gone. He rose from his prostrate position, and would even have got out of the litter, but the King would not suffer him. So the Baron said in cool

calm tones, omitting the quaver with which he had lately been speaking : "Sire !" said he ; "Your Majesty brings me comfort, and honours me too much by your concern. I cannot express my feelings, and will but say that I have recognized the visible aid of God. Thanks to His goodness my wounds are in good case, even the large one on my hip, and in at most two months I hope to gain some more in your service, and for the same wage—love of your Majesty."

At this, Henri was much nearer weeping than laughing, so deeply was he moved. He embraced Monsieur de Rosny, who had spoken so with such modesty and composure, and without a hint of arrogance. "Look, my lords !" he cried. "Here is a true and noble knight !"

He accompanied the train for a short distance, bent over the litter, and said in an undertone :

"Make haste and recover, Rosny, you obstinate old heretic ; we have to take Paris."

To which the Baron, in a whisper too : "Your Majesty scarce speaks like one of the Religion."

Henri, in an ever lower voice : "Would that trouble you ?"

Rosny, into the King's ear :

"Sire ! You may not ask an obstinate Huguenot like me to advise you to go to Mass. But one thing I will say to you, that this is the quickest and easiest way to counter the machinations of your enemies."

The King sat erect in the saddle. As though he had not heard, he pointed to the castle, now not far distant. "Farewell, my friend. If I succeed, and am increased in power and greatness, you may be very certain of your share, Monsieur de Rosny."

So saying, he set spurs to his horse, and with hunt and pack behind him the King of France dashed off at a gallop through the woodland domains of his astute and faithful servant. Suddenly the trees thinned, and he came out upon fields edged by tall birches, quivering faintly against the blue of heaven. Bent over the ground peasants stood toiling—looked up when they heard the clatter of hooves,

and made ready to leap aside. But the hunt halted suddenly, and the King, whom these folk did not yet know, pointed to the purple walls towering above the distant peaks. And he said to the oldest of the men : " Tell me, friend, to whom does that castle belong ? "

" Monsieur de Rosny," answered the old man.

" Give me a handful of earth," said the King to the man's sturdy son, who reached it up to him on his horse. The King poured the earth from one hand to the other. " Good rich earth. To whom do the fields belong ? "

" Monsieur de Rosny."

" Look ! " The King crushed a clod in his fingers ; in it shone a silver crown. " That is for Madelon. Whisk up your apron." The girl did so, he tossed the coin into it, and she laughed up at him with half-closed eyes—in them a glint of roguery and secret understanding, familiar to him from his youthful days.

As he rode on he shouted back :

" You have a good master, and he will always find me a good master too."

The peasants looked at each other open-mouthed, then, speechless with amazement, they ran a little way after the cavalcade. The galloping horsemen departed in a cloud of dust, the hounds bayed exultantly, and a huntsman wound his horn.

A PIT OF HELL

" Praised be God, the King is dead," said the people of Paris, and they did indeed believe that this time he not merely had been defeated, but that the game was played out. And the King let them so believe. Rain fell interminably, the high-roads were deserted, and nothing was heard of him, though he was but a day distant at Nantes. He had had to take the town by assault, like all the others. Once within its walls, he gave the bakers a feast. The Craft had heard tell that the King owned a mill down in his

native country and was known as the miller of Bubaste. To do honour to his name, he played ball with them ; they won all his money and then wanted to stop. He demanded his revenge, and when they refused he ordered bread to be baked throughout the night. Next day he sold it at half price ; whereupon the bakers were truly eager to play once more.

He took care that this affair should be reported in Paris. Thus they not merely learned that he was alive, which was disastrous enough ; but that he was buying up corn everywhere. His army must be enormous ! Suddenly everyone knew and admitted that the King had won at Ivry. . . . He had utterly defeated the Duke. Fat Mayenne and his shattered army would never get to Paris on those sodden roads. They were lost. Nothing would stop the heretic, they could but sit and wait for him. Last time he had pillaged the outer wards and killed nine thousand citizens.

Eight hundred, in fact ; but the terror of the great city exaggerated on every count—Henri's ruthlessness and their own impotence. He was waging war on the mills and the grain-merchants of France. . . . They would starve, said they, paralyzed by foreboding, while they watched the Spaniards getting in supplies. The Spaniards were the Ambassador Mendoza and the Archbishop of Toledo, the latter on a special mission, that he might report to Don Philip what was the most pressing need of those next to be subjected to the World Power—faith or money. It was, in truth, bread, as was very plain to the Archbishop. He and the Spanish party made provision, especially the sixteen prefects of the city wards, and above all the religious houses.

The Dukes of Aumale and Nemours commanded the garrison, and were, come what might, allied with Spain, but at heart they were for France, as was not too common in Paris at that time ; only older folk, lying in prison, remembered the meaning of freedom, religion and sound sense. A certain Bernard Palissy wrote from the Bastille

offering the Duke of Nemours, a Guise, the philosopher's stone. This was the name he gave to a certain petrified skull—and he really meant that the sight of such an ancient relic of humanity should warn Lorraine to abandon the futile and disastrous ambition of his House, and recognize the true King of France. 'We shall soon appear before God,' observed the sage, and he never learned that Nemours had actually been stricken with remorse when he touched that "philosopher's stone".

Then there was Lorraine's sister, the famous Duchess of Montpensier, whose husband was serving in the army of the King; she herself was his enemy, and proud of having suborned the late King's murderer. Not satisfied with that exploit, she wanted to see the Huguenot upon the scaffold. Nay—on the wheel and gallows! The Fury of the League once more from her balcony harangued the student youth of Paris, until they carried her cry of murder through the streets. Meantime, the beautiful, but now ageing Duchess lay within, clutching her heaving bosom. The hatred and the thirst for vengeance, that so wrought upon her, had grown to torture, and in the end she began to doubt her senses. Navarre's victory at Ivry, she had heard of through her defeated brother Mayenne, before even the Spaniards themselves, but she had long kept the knowledge to herself, and would not admit the reason until it mastered her. "Navarre," she said, that she might not say "France"; but in her passionate breast his name was merely Henri, and her hatred was as much a torment to her as his good fortune. She heard that he had captured the Prior of the monastery whence came the monk whom she had suborned to murder the King. Henri handed the Prior over to his tribunal at Tours; the Prior had been torn asunder by four horses; the Duchess lay three hours unconscious. Ambroise Paré visited her, an old surgeon whom all respected, though he was a Huguenot. He bled the lady, and when she awoke she said: "Has he come?"—in a tone and with an expression that made the old man recoil, though he had seen the night

of Saint Bartholomew, and several times looked upon the face of Hell.

The great city believed every rumour. They believed him come while he was still reflecting whether he should again launch his soldiers against the outer wards of Paris. They cried that they were starving, when their markets might well have been full ; but they were betrayed by the prefects of the sixteen city wards, whose minds were Spanish, though their speech was French. On the 8th of May, in the year 1590, the King had his capital completely beleaguered at last. This time he left no outlet, neither to the right nor left of the river, took the outer wards, put down violence, and kept up a desultory cannonade over the walls—but did no more than beset them closely, so that none could pass.

On the 14th the processions began. The monks marched at the head of the city guard. They had all eaten, the monks more heavily than was needful ; they panted painfully under the cuirasses in which their portly persons were confined. Habits were belted up, cowls thrown back, the men of God were helmeted and weaponed. When the Papal Legate appeared, these ghostly warriors, in offering him due salutations, shot his almoner. Whereupon the Duke of Nemours said, as man to man, to the Duke of Aumale : “ How long are we to take part in this scandal ? I am a Lorrainer, and a Frenchman too ; but this is Spain. We are on the wrong side. We should be outside the walls, with our seventeen hundred Germans, eight hundred French infantry and six hundred cavalry. Guise or Navarre—that could be decided outside in honourable fashion.” And d’Aumale replied : “ Do not forget the city guard, and the slaughtered victims : nor the terror of reprisals, always so savage in a civil war. Suppose we withdraw now : Paris will sink into an orgy of terror and massacre, and swear that all was done in the interests of the true religion.”

The other stretched out a hand towards the swaying, shouting procession in token that he had understood. “ Paris would be Spanish,” said Nemours. “ We Guises

are betrayed. Don Philip no longer even sends the soldiers' pay. Mendoza coins beggars' pennies and throws them out of his windows. To what purpose? The people are eating cats' meat; and that only on Sunday."

The two noblemen were always heavily guarded when they rode through the city they were charged to defend. The passers-by commonly fled, from evil conscience, or because none trusted their fellows. No one cared to be seen alone. The bands that ranged the streets would venture nothing unless they were in outnumbering force. They searched the religious houses, headed by the city guard; but they found no more than what they could devour on the spot, all else was securely hidden away. Whereat they jeered at the monks, and told them that on a derelict ship the fattest are eaten first. When they were filled, and not until then, came Mass and a sermon, that courage and zeal might be fortified.

Others crowded round the towers, and wanted to climb up to see the fields and the ripening crops from far away. Then they stormed the square outside the Parliament and cried hoarsely for bread. Among the women madness had broken out; they offered themselves to be slaughtered and their flesh sold, if only their children might be fed.

Brisson, President of the High Court, had done what he could for these poor folk. He himself had no resources, being an honourable man. Many had indeed been fed in his house on that suspicious flour, brought in by smugglers, not from any mill, but from the cemetery by night. Brisson, a Humanist, and devoted to the Law, and hence at heart a King's man, treated with Monsieur de Nemours to save this besotted city. They conducted the most perilous talk upon which a great burgher and a great lord could venture under the iron sky of fanaticism. They both agreed that the revolt of godless unreason had now truly reached its furthest limit, and the destruction of the League, at whatever cost of life, was henceforward the only means of coming to terms with human reason and with God.

At whatever cost——! said they, looking doubtfully from behind a curtain through the open window. What they saw was the church, and the thronged portal, the street packed with people, all dumb, all pale with hunger, kneeling from weakness, or standing vacant-eyed; and the only sound was the voice of the preacher—a roar . . . “The King will abolish the Mass and destroy you all. Good people, remember your salvation! . . .” The man of lies, Boucher, had for years flung them forth in his cunning tirades, and he carried them to their limit, even beyond the abyss; he snarled and bellowed from his pulpit. Those beneath him recoiled against the throng behind, who tottered and moaned in their deadly fear and weakness. Some were crushed and trodden down, almost without a sound save for that faint moaning and the roaring of the preacher. Brisson and Nemours ended their vain talk. They were, of course, overheard. Monks with a murderous mob forced their way in, crying for the whole Parliament to be hanged. The Duke had to order his men to fire.

But, after the worthy Boucher’s abuse of the King and human reason, his hearers departed as hungry as before, first in a broad flow of human bodies, then in slower streamlets, followed by a few stragglers like runnels that cannot find the main watercourse. These trickled in misery and weariness into the surrounding streets. A woman sank exhausted against a house wall. O joy! Her boy had caught sight of a rat in the gutter, partly open and partly covered, that ran down the middle of the street. The boy clambered into it, crawled under the flagstones, and wound himself out of the tunnel grasping the creature. “Something to eat, mother!” At that moment two *landsknechts* came up, one a giant, the other a little fellow with a peaked nose. He grabbed the boy, and tried to seize the rat, but the boy shrieked and would not let it go. Then the huge *landsknechts* picked up the boy, grasped him by the back of his jerkin, and holding the child in his fist like a parcel from a shop, he stamped round the

corner of the next street. His sallow friend, who had one sunken eye, glanced back once, and they had gone.

The few people in the alley stood rooted in terror, and in the stillness the wailing of the child was heard for a little while. His mother made as though to run after him, but staggered, and stumbled against another woman who just then came out of a house. Then came the mother's shriek, a shriek of horror and despair, and she fell to the pavement and lay motionless ; the woman from the house stepped over her. Two old folks in a dark corner whispered : " This isn't the first time. The dame yonder knows only too well what the *lands knechts* will do with that boy. Her own son died, but no one saw him dead, and since then they have lived on salted food." Their quavering voices faded, the old creatures crept away, and the woman from the house passed by. She was almost a lady, she gathered up her dress lest it should drag in the mud. In her stony face the eyes glared crazily into a void.

A STRUGGLE OF CONSCIENCE

But next day the King let three thousand persons out of the city, that they might not die of hunger. His exalted ally, Elizabeth of England, heard of it, and was very displeased. He had to send his special envoy, Philip Mornay, to pacify her ; and he did so gladly, for he was not sorry to get Mornay away for a while. He was to represent to the Queen that the death of a few poor French folk would not have induced the Spanish party to surrender Paris, so long as they themselves were still supplied. Moreover, he allowed the population to make brief forays by night, to harvest the corn on the fields under the walls. Bread suddenly reappeared in the bakers' shops, wherefore the people blessed the King. The monks and the city guard replied by spreading deeper terror, and the news that the King was merely providing bread because of his great need for Spanish gold. His army was dissolving, and the

troops of their rightful lord, Don Philip, were on the march. Praise be to God, the paltry heretic was lost. His grandest dream, to see the capital of his kingdom perish, would not be fulfilled.

Henri heard all this, and was horror-struck. The monstrous doings that went on behind those walls and reached his ears, were—alas!—no new thing; his conscience told him so, and as time passed his conscience grew ever more insistent. . . . This was unworthy conflict. He was fighting unarmed men, the citizens of his own capital. Men broken by exhaustion, and half demented, they were even transgressing against nature,—while he ate and slept in safety.

Wherein his conscience had not told the whole tale, as he well knew. He was also in the midst of an intrigue with the lovely abbess of a nunnery, and he actually transferred his quarters to another monastic house. And Henri's conscience reminded him, after a night of pleasure, that these nuns gave themselves to him like Judith to Holofernes. At first they were but lambs on the slaughter-bench, but in the end they turned to raving furics, as they saw the fires of damnation, and they would kill him if they could. There lay a curse and a blight upon heresy,—thought the Protestant King, but wore, as before, a curl round his ear in the fashion of his fellows. Marshal Biron bantered him on his "change of creed", the name he gave to the diversion Henri sought with several holy ladies. The King sent for the old man, and for the first time made clear that he meant to abjure his religion and adopt the other.

The resolve was wrung from him by remorse, and misery over the deeds that he had really committed, though in some measure against his will. Which no old veteran could ever understand—though indeed Biron was well acquainted with all the darkneses and depths in the character of the debonair monarch. Their own disputes, before these two had found each other and embraced, had indeed been of a sort to try and test them both; as Biron never forgot. Erect and lean, swaying slightly from the wine he drank

at all hours of the day, without ever beclouding his wits, a death's-head with a hanging moustache—there stood Marshal Biron, pondering and giving utterance, no one would have guessed with what affection for his master, and how full of doubt. "Sire, shall I make this known?"

Henri nodded, he could not find his voice. Then he whispered: "Yes—but as though you were lying."

To which Biron retorted: "Vain it is to try to guess the truth. I do not know it myself. For Your Majesty has, as a Huguenot, defended your faith and your claim to the throne for more than twenty years; even against myself, who was your enemy and the enemy of Admiral Coligny, whom we Papists brought to such a dreadful death. I have forgotten nothing that happened in those days. And you, Sire?"

It was kindly, but weightily spoken, and the King listened. Here was a Catholic who meant to warn him; and Henri asked himself whether he should really abjure the religion of the Queen his mother. He felt himself peering into a livid glare of light, from which someone marked and watched him—and who that was, only his sense of guilt could tell. He was dazzled, the glare was the inner light of conscience. And the figures of his mother and the Lord Admiral rose before his vision.

Pale, and greatly shaken, he stiffened, controlled his voice, and repeated his command. At the last moment he turned in the doorway and cried to the Marshal: "But don't tell my Protestants. Not my Protestants."

He knew that they would, of course, hear of it. And he could predict the attitude of every one of his old friends. Glad he was that he had sent the austere Mornay to England. By the time the rumour reached that country it would be an idle legend, and though Queen Elizabeth might well conceive suspicion, Mornay would talk her out of it. His face indeed was absent, but there were others and enough to show him stern or melancholy countenances. Roquelaure, so eager for distinction, and Turenne, the man of the future, these were strong enough to speak

their minds, and to look askance at a perjured King. Agrippa made as though he had no inkling of what was going forward, but did in truth intend to take his King unawares. "Sire!" he began, "I am in a tribulation of conscience."

"You, Agrippa?"

"I. Who else? A friend in Paris has betrayed to me the names of certain conspirators, and has even sent me their letters that I may see what they are plotting against Your Majesty's life."

"Give them to me."

"To you? Why, Sire, the Spanish Ambassador will pay me more than you, if I let him know the business is discovered. But although I am always much set upon money, as you are aware, I would never seek it by dealings with the enemies of the Religion and my King."

"You prefer to wait until the murderers have got me? Or what price do you offer?"

Agrippa had never looked so formidable as at that moment. In a minute he seemed to have grown three inches.

"None. Care has been taken that when these people come into your presence you shall not know them."

"Then I will not believe that I was ever in danger."

"As you please, Sire," said Agrippa boldly, and with his usual touch of humour. Soon afterwards it came about that certain Spanish lords, by direction of Don Philip, offered an Infanta in marriage to the King of France. Henri, in his anxiety for peace with his subjects, made haste to receive the envoys. Only the first of them was brought to him, and his hands were held, the left one by another, the right by Agrippa, who made as though the gesture were an undesigned courtesy—but gripped the man's wrist fast. Henri understood. He promptly dismissed the pretended agent, nor did he ask what became of him and his fellows. He offered no reward to Agrippa d'Aubigné for saving his life, still less did he thank him for the lesson that a man may be unselfish, honest, and resolutely loyal to his own cause.

He believed that disloyalty was a charge upon himself from God, since it was his destiny to save the kingdom. . . . He gave honour to God—thus Henri justified his disloyalty, a none too easy matter before an all-knowing Deity. He obeyed Him against the memory of his mother and the Admiral, of all the champions of conscience, against the creed of the Pastors, and heedless of a million victims of the religious wars. Neither old friends, nor party, nor the beloved cities in which worship was allowed, nor even La Rochelle, could be regarded now. No comradeship with those of his own faith, no psalm in battle ; nothing could stand against the call of the kingdom. For that was more than a creed or a purpose, more even than fame ; here were human creatures like himself ; so he told himself, and so he really felt : that he was saved. Human creatures—but some of them, beyond those walls, that he could see with his own eyes, sinned against nature. Thus it befell them, so soon as there was no King to hold them to their duty as men. That he would do, and that alone would justify him before the face of God and man.

“ We will receive the two infidels,” said he ; by which he meant the Cardinal of Paris and the Archbishop of Lyons. He called them infidels to confirm his faith in the kingdom, of which such creatures take little account. With more than a thousand noblemen he betook himself one August day to the cloister outside the beleaguered city, where their emissaries waited on him. They were gentlemen of weight and dignity, and had as yet suffered no privation, nor had any of their suite. They bowed before the King, but not obsequiously ; the beleaguered city had no need to do so, in the person of her envoys. The King could not greet them with equal ceremony, the press around him was too great. And he said : “ Do not be surprised to see me so beset. It is worse in battle.”

He might well think that these men’s sole purpose was to gain time, until Mayenne could get fresh troops from Flanders and relieve Paris. Their parleys with the King might placate the starving folk of Paris, who might otherwise

be tempted to an outbreak. The two Bishops were for their part convinced that the starvation of a few thousand common folk was as indifferent to him as to themselves. It was merely a question whether his popularity would allow him to admit as much. The most sagacious course seemed on both sides an exact observance of the formalities, wherefore the King asked the envoys for their written credentials, which they gave him. Therein was written that the Lords Cardinal and Archbishop were to approach the "King of Navarre", and beg him to consent to a general pacification of the kingdom; and then the Duke of Mayenne, that he too might give his mind to the matter. Vain words, and an insult to the Royal rank.

Whereat Henri pointed out that it was no business of a "King of Navarre" to pacify Paris and France. However, he wanted to see his kingdom in peace and quiet, and cared not to dispute a title. He said he would give a finger for so much, and indeed he offered two. One finger was worth a battle to him, but he promised two for a general peace. The two ghostly diplomats found him apt in dissimulation, and he rose in their esteem. . . . "But," he cried, to their increased amazement, "Paris will wait in vain for peace so long as terror and starvation reign within her walls. We want no bodiless words of peace. I love my city of Paris. She is my eldest daughter." Herewith he unmasked their embassy of peace; but not everyone, whose nakedness was now plain, observed it.

He had lain a prisoner in Paris, that was all, said the two clerics to themselves. He called himself father of the people, but let him once suffer defeat, and he would find himself behind bars again, whence he would never come out alive. And when he went on to compare himself with the true mother before Solomon, and said he would sooner abandon Paris, than win it through violence and death, their admiration was not unmingled with amusement, and they exchanged a meaning glance. Then they set about capping his dexterous deceit. They pretended to be doubtful of his military strength, and the extent of his victories;

they foreboded a turn in his fortunes. If Paris surrendered before the establishment of a general peace, Mayenne and the King of Spain would recover it again, and their vengeance would be terrible. Then they saw what they had never seen before.

A soldier, upon whom the grace of majesty descended before their very eyes. They no longer understood who was here speaking, and from what an eminence. He swore an oath, then paused in horror at his own words, but once again he swore—and by the living God. “We’ll beat them,” came an answering clamour from his noblemen, and their outburst was far more effective than a practised unison. “We’ll beat them. It is truly sworn! No dishonour while God lives!” The envoys realized in amazement that he had taken his stand in conflict with their world; against the crippled ruler of the earth, Philip, the inhuman dominion of Hapsburg, a living majesty had raised its claim. They must confront it, and believe. In life most things happen at a venture—such is the daily experience of high-placed, sceptical gentlemen, who regard every man of power as a betrayer and accept him as such. A shudder ran through their limbs, and before their eyes the earthly picture quivered, as they envisaged true majesty. Majesty—a feeble word for what was a plainly overmastering grace from God—how vague and unconvinced is the common attitude to God and grace! Two Princes of the Church had never considered the matter, until faced with a soldier, upon whom the grace of majesty descended before their very eyes.

Thenceforward Henri had his enemies in his hand during that parley. When the moment of high vocation had passed, he made lavish use of his advantage. He no longer treated the pair seriously, but demanded the surrender of Paris within a week, as though it were a trifle. Majesty may never long endure, we would not wear it out; grace, too, is a rare visitor; moreover, we are too well disposed to our good people to use greatness to force them to their knees.

“You have a week, good friends. If you would prefer

to put off the surrender until supplies are quite exhausted, do so ; that will mean a hangman's breakfast for you, and then the rope."

"No King of France could be so merciless to his capital, nor any Christian to two servants of God."

"Then wait and see."

"It is to be feared that we two shall again be sent to you, but next time with ropes round our necks."

"Then surrender the city at once."

"If the Spaniards and the sixteen hear of it, they will hang us."

"Then wait for Mayenne and fresh troops from Flanders."

"Your Majesty might defeat them in the end, and we should the more surely be hanged."

"Then plead for surrender."

"Sire ! You would forget our services and hand us over to the vengeance of the people."

"Then let them starve."

"You are falsely informed, Sire ; no one is starving as yet."

"Then I bid you prosper. The cemeteries are not yet exhausted, plenty of children are left untended, and mothers fall down in fainting-fits."

Whereto they ventured no answer, but bowed their heads ; there was no more spirit left in them. Their ground had slipped from under them, they felt they had let themselves be outwitted by the King. He had played a question-and-answer game with them, after the fashion of the famous scene in Rabelais ; he, who used to be a mere buffoon. Their dignity was gone, and they were utterly bewildered. The King gave them no time to recover, indeed he dealt them the finishing blow. His last words were not quickly nor lightly spoken, but with solemnity of a judge.

"Monsieur de Lyon," said he to the Archbishop, "a little while ago you fell into a press of people on St Michael's bridge. Some of them flung themselves before your horse,

and cried for bread or death. Did not an old man speak to you ? ”

“ I do not remember,” stammered Monsieur de Lyon, and his head swam, as it probably would do on Judgment Day.

“ He did so speak, and he said that these cries of despair were a last reminder from God.”

At this secret revelation by the King, a faintness came upon Monsieur de Lyon, as upon a humble mother when she sees her child carried off for some dreadful purpose. His retinue supported him, and the Cardinal stood pale and haggard at his side. The King called for wine to hearten them, and while they drank it he mounted his horse. As he rode away, he told the nearest of his noblemen who it was that had warned the Archbishop on the bridge. Master Ambroise Paré, a surgeon, and eighty-five years old, had used his last strength to speak upon the bridge, and now he lay dying. “ In old days he was with the murdered Coligny,” said King Henri, set his lips fast, and spoke no more.

His companions were silent, there was no sound save the dull clatter of hooves. Henri was thinking of old Huguenots. As one of them, and still the same, so rode he here.

AN ARTIST

From his camp some officers came to meet him. Farnese was on the march. He was already in Meaux. The King laughed contemptuously, for Meaux was too near, he would have had the news before ; moreover, his friends the Archbishop and the Cardinal would certainly have had it too, and would not have let him fool them until they fell down in a faint. He shrugged his shoulders, and rode on, to where two men were exchanging high words by the roadside. Monsieur de la Noue had reined in his horse with his iron hand. Monsieur de Rosny sat askew on his, for his heroic wounds would not let him sit otherwise ; one arm was in a sling.

“ Softly, gentlemen,” said the King.

"Sire. Farnese," said La Noue.

"Sire," said Rosny, "it is a ruse. He cannot be at Meaux."

"Sire !" cried the older man, "whom do you believe, this nincompoop or me ? Farnese is so cunning that he sometimes even spreads the truth."

Rosny, crosswise on his saddle, diamonds in his hat, but his face composed and cold, turned his back on his guileless elder, and drew up beside the King. "Mere gossip," said he contemptuously. Upon which de la Noue burst out—

"Young man ! Ride thither in those fine clothes of yours. You'll please the Duke so much that he'll take you prisoner."

"Sir !" rejoined Rosny, "I have one arm, and so have you : let us fight."

"I must watch this," said the King, but rather absently. Only the older man looked cheerful. His face had flushed dark red under his white thatch of hair, and the angry face lit up with a boyish laugh.

"I was a prisoner for five years among the Spaniards, and a sore time it was. Sire ! In my gaol I wrote upon religion and the art of war, and only thus I kept my courage. But the art of war that I described was that of Farnese. He is an artist, never forget it, Sire !"

"Our King is no artist, but a soldier, which stands for more," observed Rosny. His maimed condition, as well as his haughty air, lent him a sort of frozen dignity. While the Breton Huguenot swung his limbs, including the iron arm, with all the more vivacity.

"What I know is the knowledge of twelve years in Flanders, in command of Protestant armies. Before the Spaniards took me, I captured any town I chose. But after the Duke of Parma came—not one."

The King, lost in his thoughts, rode on, and evening fell. Next day came news that the Army of the League, with Mayenne, and the Spanish reinforcements under Farnese, had met at Meaux. In the King's council of war La Noue urged a firm stand before Paris, while Biron,

also an old man, demanded an advance. We must attack : we have always attacked.

"Sire," said La Noue, "Your Majesty is unrivalled in battle. But you have never met with an enemy who evades battle, and gets all he wants by art. I, Sire, know Farnese."

Rosny was on the point of another outburst against this boorish captain in his leather doublet ; but the Vicomte de Turenne, not less noble and handsome than Rosny, restrained him : the youth's fiery ambition had sharpened his judgment of a situation and even of his fellow men. Marshal Biron was able to explain without interruption that the Royal army, extended all round Paris, could not fail to offer weak points. The enemy would force them and get provisions into the city. Whereupon La Noue :

"But in so doing he must cross a river or go through a wood. That is our moment."

"Attack," repeated Biron. "March on the enemy, when he is far away and not expecting you : that is war."

"Farnese knows your kind of war," cried La Noue. Slowly, and with an air from which all the gaiety had gone he added, "But you do not know his war."

"Mere superstition," remarked that alert young captain, Turenne, while Rosny smiled a chilly smile, and Biron blew out his nostrils. The King questioned all the others, and as they observed that he wanted to attack, the majority voted an advance.

Now at the outset the famed Farnese, Duke of Parma, stirred his gallant adversaries to something very near contempt. Would the commander of such a host entrench himself behind a swamp ? The advancing Royalists merely observed the swamp because it blocked their way. They did not see the hill behind, which masked the disaster that was to come.

The Royalists held all the communications with Paris, especially the River Marne, and Lagny, on which Farnese might well have schemed to make a covert raid. Meantime he entrenched himself behind his swamp, as though he

feared nothing so much as the attack of the new captain facing him—but he kept that new Captain waiting for his battle ; a day, and then a week. The King had a fine array of noblemen, who found the delay tedious, and one by one they rode off with their companies. As for the capital—though they had to beleaguer it for a year, it must have fallen in the end, and filled all their pockets. The elusive Farnese behind his trenches, and among his waggon barricades, promised no profit ; noblemen, whose sole concern was plunder, made their excuses until further notice. Men like Rosny stood fast, partly from a sense of honour, and also because they thought that Spanish baggage must surely contain gold pistoles. A day would come when he would slit those sacks, and cram his saddle-bags. . . .

Henri had to admit himself baffled and mystified by his famous adversary. The King sent a trumpeter to taunt the Dukes to venture from their lair. The Italian answered coolly that he had not come so far to ask advice from the enemy. The King grew irritable, but he did not get his battle ; he did not even get a sight of Farnese's face. Daily Henri rode out of Lagny, which was covered by his army, though the river was his main line of defence ;—made his way round the swamp and waited for Farnese.

Days passed, and he could never get a glimpse of him. But more humiliating still—his scouts reported that Farnese was dreaded by his men, and not a soldier deserted. Guard was mounted with iron precision. In the silence of the night, especially, the voices of the reliefs could be heard, in several tongues, but all in unison. With them had come an iron discipline, that had brought them down from Flanders in only twenty days ; every evening they had entrenched their camp, like Cæsar's legionaries. Under other generals these same troops would have been no more than a polyglot horde, mostly Walloons and Italians, with a sprinkling of Spaniards, ravaging the land like wild beasts :—but under Parma they were a veritable Roman army.

Henri did not sleep, for he knew that yonder lay his

adversary awake, devising to destroy his fame. Such were his orders from Don Philip. Henri must be on his guard. In vain he tried to pierce the darkness. Not a light in Farnese's quarters ; though he never slept. Henri half-believed that he could see in the dark, and had his eye on his opponent. He was said to be a sick man, and old ; indeed he might be a shadow and a demon, and not a living man at all. On a damp and moonless night a man shivers readily, especially when his thoughts are hovering towards the unknown. Henri swung sharply round, something had touched his shoulder. For an instant he looked into a face : a face caught unawares, which, as it vanished, left an impress on the dark and stagnant air, that reeked of swamp and decay.

With a burst of laughter Henri turned and went. The echo of his laughter seemed to mock him, but he remembered in time that the renowned strategist had not worsted the Hollanders, as had gradually become known. His affairs had gone ill in Holland. Moreover he himself looked with disfavour on a campaign in France ; he was only here by Don Philip's orders. Can a man command to order, and win victories for others ? Parma was himself a ruling Prince, but forgot his dukedom in the service of the King of Spain—who might well be paralyzed, for he merely sat, and dreamed, and issued orders for the conquest of foreign kingdoms to a sick man like himself, campaigning in a foreign land. What would be the end ?

On the morning after that night of many questions, Parma began to provide the answers ; he drew up his army for battle : only, indeed, the army of the League, but he had exchanged their helmets and banners for his own. It was a September day, the fight was hot, and the King's Frenchmen thought they had at last encountered the fabulous Spaniards, before whom the world trembled, but not they ! As the weapons crossed, behold !—both sides spoke in French. Once engaged, they hewed all the more savagely at these supposed Spaniards, with familiar faces. Meantime Farnese withdrew his centre from the battle unremarked.

He had not even confided in the fat Mayenne, who was laying about him in the van. Behind that modest hill, which had figured more largely in his plans than the swamp and his entrenchments, he threw his troops across the Marne by a bridge of boats—silently and secretly, and under iron discipline. And the battle was so hot that the manœuvre was unnoticed by the combatants. Of the two, Mayenne and Henri, the latter first grasped what had happened. Lagny was taken, or almost taken, from the further side, and as Mayenne too, at last enlightened, was bombarding it from the near side of the river, the Royalists fell back, and the battle was lost.

Paris was then revictualled by water, while the King attempted a few sharp forays, and even tried to escalate his capital. Farnese said of him : “ I expected to find a King. I found a hussar.” He cast yet more contempt upon the Duke of Mayenne, of the great House of Guise, by letting him plunge so bravely into what his own manœuvre turned into a meaningless encounter. Still, for all his anger, Mayenne could not but be glad that Farnese had left three regiments behind him. When all was duly completed, the great man started on his return march to Flanders. The King promptly sat down before Paris once more : which was a matter of no moment to the strategist.

He certainly conceived the King as an overrated mediocrity, who only needed to be put in his place. As an enemy he was about a match for Mayenne. *Vale et me ama.*

WE WANT TO LIVE

For two full days afterwards Henri was in truth a beaten man. This affair was more disastrous now than in earlier days, after so much patient fighting, some brilliant victories, and in the face of the rising estimation of the world. The capture of the capital postponed, though the provinces had been stripped of troops for just that purpose. More-

over there was no money, for those two days no bread was baked ; even the King's shirts were in rags. Of the company the King then kept, the less said the better.

Totus mundus exercet histrionem ; we are all comedians, and when a man's affairs go awry, he soon finds himself amid a rabble of hearty friends, blown thither upon every breeze. A dispossessed German archbishop, turned Protestant from wanton pride : whom did such a man recall ? We too are minded to betray our religion. D'O is a rascal but he is rich, he shall invite us, and entertain our pimps.

On the evening of Ivry, the Treasurer had made a gross remark—degrading it was and not to be forgotten. Henri had not forgotten it, and had shunned the speaker. Not indeed of set purpose : such avoidance is natural when our inner being stands on the defensive, not merely against a stranger, but in truth against our own self. What is a word ? 'Tis ill to recognize it as though it had been known already and merely kept concealed.

The Treasurer was now taken back into favour. A man of money is a friend, even though, like a certain Gascon captain, misfortunes in love have deprived him of his nose. The King frequented adventurers, whom many viewed with horror.

Yes. And he allowed them about him, to use them as tests of himself, his health and his powers of resistance. Harken to what is happening in Paris, where the citizens are now but maniac impersonations of themselves. In the end each man's own folly carries him along and justifies his life. But men of nobler stamp find it the more impossible, and indeed repellent, to live continually at the peak of folly. Familiar with adventurers up to the point when we ourself appear to be one ! Even to-day a bullet may find its mark, and this shabby little King shall be put away in earth ; never to have ploughed up this land with the hooves of his horses, never to have possessed it as his kingdom. In Paris they hanged the President of the High Court on a charge of conspiring for his King, and against Spain.

A decisive deed, that severs city and kingdom more surely than the strongest walls, when he who embodies the law is put to death. Hence the enemies of President Brisson had recourse to all manner of subterfuges. They canvassed signatures for the death of one unnamed, and not till later was he revealed as the supreme magistrate of France. They appealed to the Spanish commanders, demanded indulgence for their deed from the frocked professors at the Sorbonne, and set preachers like Boucher to harangue the people. In the grey of dawn Brisson was lured into the street, and hurried to prison with two of his Assessors; there their enemies hanged the three of them from a beam, and watched them by lantern light until the three bodies seemed limp enough, and their faces looked as they were meant to look. Then they brought their three charges, duly trussed and habited, to the Place de la Grève and hung them on the common gallows.

The great jurist had never conceived that lawlessness could reach such a pitch ; there existed a legal code, the earliest in the land, and he was its author. But the activities of the mind not merely set a man at variance with evil reality ; they dispossess it until it grows incredible. For the populace, far otherwise. They are hugely exalted, when the supreme magistrate so strangely suffers the most degrading death of all. The ultimate brutality that commonly subjects the human spirit, is the violation of justice. As it was morning, the square filled up, and the enemy of the dead man, standing beneath the feet of the pendant corpse, began to proclaim the treachery of Brisson ; he had planned to deliver Paris to the King, who would have visited his wrath upon the city, and each and all of them would have met an evil end. People of Paris ! You are saved ; there hangs Brisson ! And he hangs upon a gallows in his shirt, and with a black and bloated face. . . . Can that be the President of the Royal parliament, one of the noblest ornaments of this poor land. . . .

None moved, the mob was benumbed by what they saw, and each fresh arrival stopped as though paralyzed. From

the corners of the square the suborned accomplices of the assassins cried out that the conspirators were rich, that their houses and all that was in them should be given to the people. None stirred. Plunder was not an affair of every day, here was an occasion to be seized ; but the people crept away to their homes. Not until they were some distance from the place of execution did they raise their voices. Then one of the Sixteen heard a man say that the King of France had won his cause with that morning's work, if he did but abjure his false religion. At this, the man—a tailor, was somewhat aghast ; and he proclaimed in a fury that he would cut the throats of all the Sixteen, save only one.

The King in the company of his adventurers, heard every word from Paris, but pretended ignorance, and let the adventurers talk—not from curiosity. He knew indeed what was in such men's minds, and what would be their advice. Abjure, at once, and the capital will open its gates. Such people are crammed with their own experiences, occasions missed and blunders made. They grew more eloquent than ever in Court and camp ; and as they had been the King's friends for two whole days, their warnings were not unheeded. Henri's hearing was acute. In the hubbub of a great hall, and apparently absorbed in his own amusement, he could distinguish distant conversations, several at the same time. A group of younger men, hidden from the King, but recognizable from their fresh voices, were listening to words of wisdom from these hardened men of the world. The ruffianly d'O was scarifying the horrors of poverty. "No man should be as poor as the King," observed Rosny. Henri, who burst out laughing at this, caught every word. After Rosny, he heard his keen young captain, Turenne, agreeing with Captain Alexis : "And keep out of trouble," announced that noseless creature.

Old Biron and de la Noue were conferring in low tones ; nor did they raise their voices, being now of one opinion. Only one thing remained for the King to do, after his

humiliation by Farnese, and that was to make an end. The end that Paris itself offered him at that hour ; they could not mean another, although shame forbade both men to name their thought ; and had the word been uttered in their presence they would have burst into a fury, Biron no less than the Protestant La Noue. As soldiers, they did not favour any peace, since war was their livelihood. Most of all, they disliked laying down their arms after defeat. None the less, they spoke of what the occasion offered, though they did not name it ; but Henri heard and understood.

He heard his Huguenot, Agrippa, raise his voice. Agrippa d'Aubigné was disputing with the German archbishop, whose conversion to Protestantism had cost him his throne, and since then conceived the Mass as the sole safeguard of thrones ; wherefore he was very urgent in favour of Mass. Henri broke away from his circle, made his way across to Agrippa and opened his mouth to say something. What he would have said was—"I will not" ; Agrippa saw very clearly what was coming. Then a nobleman called Chicot touched the King's arm. Chicot could say what others dared not ; for which reason he was called the King's Fool, and with a sort of ironic good sense he had assumed that office. The King, too, behaved as though he had really conferred it, and let the so-called Fool speak truths he would not himself have admitted. And what was both new and true, it was the Fool's privilege to be the first to utter. Chicot nudged the King, cut him short, and said for all to hear :

"Friend, you have a queasy look. Take a holy water clyster."

A man whose calling is that of Fool, should surely rouse a laugh. But the bystanders said nothing, and the silence held the room until it grew burdensome. The thronged company suddenly noticed they could no longer breathe : windows were flung open to the evening ; and as they all pressed towards them, Henri and his old friend Agrippa found themselves isolated in the middle of the room. Both

were pale, as they noticed by the light of the tapers that then appeared. And both were silent, each stricken by the feeling that the last word had been uttered.

It had been Agrippa's habit to compose abusive verses, when in his opinion the King had treated him ungratefully. He was a man of high temper and ready speech, and had never shrunk from telling his King a harsh truth. He risked what would be ill received, and was rewarded with disfavour. But not this time ; it was plain that the King was in sore distress. Agrippa dropped his eyes, and said :

"You have fought a long fight and a good one."

"The end is not yet," retorted Henri.

Agrippa's sole answer was to raise his eyes.

"Agrippa," said Henri in a voice of authority. "We will call upon the Lord our God."

"I call upon you, Sire, and beg for my discharge at last."

"It was for that Du Bartas also died," said Henri, half to himself. "We know each other : and we want to live." Whereupon they left the company.

They mounted their horses, and afar in the open country, they came upon watch-fires, tents, the encampments of an army ; no one about the King, not even the alert d'Aubigné, had a notion of what had been going forward. Henri had been raising a new army, heedless of the one that had dissolved ; he had written countless secret letters, sent out envoys, and from far away he had heartened his noblemen with words of which even Agrippa, a poet, had not the mastery. That he had done without a spoken word, while to all appearance he was frequenting his adventurers, and preparing for his apostasy. "Sire," said Agrippa aloud. "I do not want my discharge, after all."

The King made no sign that he had heard ; he was busy issuing orders regarding the approaching march on Rouen. If Paris could not be captured this time, then the capital of Normandy should be taken from the League

forthwith, and Mayenne, and Farnese too, should be drawn northwards, to battlefields well known to one at least. Agrippa d'Aubigné, as he rode round the camp, in the wake of this amazing King of his, grasped the plan, and savoured its shrewdness : suddenly he was dumbfounded to hear the King call to one of his pastors : " Monsieur Damours. Lead the men in prayer."

This same pastor had, by the King's command, struck up the Psalm at Arques, and so, on the edge of ruin, brought victory over the mighty army of the League, and deliverance to the champions of freedom and of conscience. Once more they were at his side. From tents and watchfires, Huguenots thronged round the King, the older men to the fore ; their faces, like their King's, were weather-beaten, and there were scars upon their bodies, as on his ; which was all they needed to know. They had fought for him, and would fight for him again, and now they would pray at his side.

Agrippa d'Aubigné, beset by hoarse, devout voices, tried to join in with them, but his own inner voice overmastered the words he would have uttered. A pious betrayal, Sirc. You are deceiving your old champions of freedom and of conscience. But your purpose is ready and resolved. You will alter nothing, as God wills not otherwise. Lord ! Thy will be done. If my King is to betray the Faith and his own word, I keep both : to God and to him. In this spirit Agrippa, too, prayed at last, and set his mind at peace.

TWO CAMPAIGNERS

The King sat down before the city of Rouen, and its capture threatened to cut off supplies from Paris. At last Mayenne marched to its relief. The leader of the League had in the meantime brought Paris halfway back to reason by hanging and by shooting, scarce before the blind fury that possessed the city had driven it into the arms of Spain.

He had indeed to summon the Spanish commander from Flanders ; without Farnese he could no longer hope to destroy the King. His formidable ally would have taken the city of Rouen as eagerly as the King himself ; on which account Mayenne had to use every sort of shift to keep him at a distance from Rouen. The King, always set upon a battle, could certainly be lured to meet them on ground of their own choosing. But the King was now acquainted with the strategist Farnese, and evaded open encounter, in the purpose of displaying arts more after his own taste. So he approached with only a body of light cavalry, nine hundred horsemen in all ; and none understood his plan.

On the way, it was reported that the Spaniards were advancing with drums and trumpets, a mighty army of eighteen thousand infantry and seven thousand cavalry, in close array, the cavalry in the centre, baggage on the flanks, while the lighter squadrons swung back and forward like the pinions of a mighty bird. The advance of Farnese over the rolling wolds was a noble spectacle for an adept in the arts of war. It appeared in view of the King, as he and his horsemen stood covered by the walls of Aumale ; but, eager to see more, he rode forward ahead of his escort.

The great armament had suddenly halted, under the spell of an apparition ; and Henri, beyond all his hopes, at last saw that apparition in the light of day : an old, withered, boylike face, beardless, peevish, and weary. Yonder he sat, a shrunken figure—for sorrow always shortens a man's stature—in a cart, at the head of his splendid army—and his feet were thrust in slippers. Thus he rumbled on two wheels up and down the ranks, master of all he saw. A wave of his hand—and beneath his eye, or on the uttermost flank, every manœuvre was fulfilled, as though between painted scenes, with stage machinery controlling evolutions that seem to be commanded by gods on fiery clouds : true triumphs of human artifice. It was a magnificent performance ; and the spectator, as he ventured

further and further into the open, could not take his eyes off what gave him such delight.

Clearly he could descry them—the withered boylike face, and the slippered feet. In the light breeze that followed him, Henri thought he could sniff a miasma of disease. He wondered whether the soldiers caught it too. Healthy men must suspect something sinister in one who is always carried or driven, and goes unarmed. Were no murderers sent against him? No. Enough that none have made the attempt. Frail he is, but unassailable. Litters and carriages carry him carefully through Europe, that he may win victories for the Ruler of the World. But he wins them coldly and without joy. He uses his talent in a spirit of renunciation, and moves on, while he allows his soldiery to burn and murder as a respite from harsh discipline. When the trumpet sounds they must stay their hands, or they are hanged. An apparition beyond all reckoning, he is feared in all his bodily frailty, and his joylessness. In him the many-tongued subject peoples of the World Dominion recognize the image of themselves.

Henri, King of France, was exposed on the open plain, with but a scanty escort behind him, who discussed in undertones how they had best warn him; but he was in no mind to tear himself away. He stood, bending forward, and scarce breathed. He would never see that sight again, indeed he would take care that it should never return. Alexander, Duke of Parma, shunned his lovely land, his jewel of a city, all the statues and the paintings; he left them all for a campaign that was no concern of his, and which he thought senseless and foolhardy; but he could not resist the practice of his art. The passage of the river at Lagny, and the magical revictualling of Paris; a masterpiece. And here, with his great stage machine, he was planning yet another marvellous surprise, yet another masterpiece of strategy.

Rosny's clear, calm voice broke in upon the King, and reminded him of how matters really stood. "Sire! Your

servants here love you more than their lives. You must not expose yours any longer."

"What—afraid?" asked the King, which rather took his gentlemen aback. However Rosny reminded him on their behalf that with nine hundred men he could not attack a large army in elaborate battle array. He had never thought to do so; but in a strange partiality for his adversary, he twitted that Farnese was the first enemy they had feared. They swore that all they valued was his life. But he yielded, for Parma's horsemen were already on him. He and his nine hundred had to fight for their lives, and many of them fell. The King was slightly wounded, he only escaped because his great adversary would not believe it was he; so much of a hussar, and so little of a King.

But Farnese was to become acquainted with this King before he departed, not long afterwards, to die. It came about that Henri beset him with marches and counter-marches on a peninsula between the Seine and the sea, which had been his purpose from the outset, the fight at Aumale merely serving to mask his plan. Then it happened: the artist and the army, his magnificent instrument, caught and held. There were no provisions on the peninsula; and a Dutch fleet was on its way to the aid of the King. Farnese, already wounded, seemed lost. What did he do? Exactly what he had done at Lagny. At that point the Seine was as broad as a lake, but he crossed it on a bridge of boats one night, without a sound. When the Royalists awoke, and the prisoned enemy had vanished, they yelled with rage. Henri laughed, and admitted the ruse was excellent. His elusive foe left behind a message that showed that he at last took another view of the King of France: and it plainly foreboded death.

"This King wears out more boots than slippers."

It was later heard that Farnese had entered Paris; but there he dealt with his friends as promptly as with his enemies. "My task ends here," he was reported to have said, to interrupt a vacant silence. He had in truth achieved

several prodigious feats, unruffled by the changing luck of war. An artist, who once his work was done, left behind what he cared nothing for,—the land and the people, and amid rolling drums and blaring trumpets, carried his fading fame beyond the horizon.

Henri's task was by no means ended ; he would have to be immortal before that came to pass ; so interminable must be the fight for what he meant to make his own ; —the hearts of his subjects.

BOOK TWO

VICISSITUDES OF LOVE

SHOW HER TO ME

The King was hunting in the woods of Compiègne ; on that day he pursued the stag almost within the confines of Picardy. There they lost the scent, the King and his Master of the Horse, the Duke of Bellegarde. The field was long since out of sight, and the two companions were resting in a clearing. The King had sat down on a fallen tree trunk. Rays of sunlight filtered through the now fading autumn foliage, and flecked it with gold, shedding a mild radiance on the two seated figures, one of forty and one of thirty years.

"If only we had something to eat!" said the King. To his astonishment the Master of the Horse promptly produced what the King had but dreamed of, set it all out upon the tree trunk, and they ate and drank their fill. While eating, the King pondered. As Bellegarde had brought provisions in his saddle-bag, his purpose must have been to leave the hunt and disappear—whither?

"Where did you mean to go, Feuillermorte?" asked the King abruptly, and with a quizzical look awaited an answer that did not come.

"You look even yellower here than usual, Feuillermorte ; 'tis the effect of all these withered leaves. You are in fact a personable fellow, and only thirty. O to be thirty again ! In those days, they were so willing, and they were always there. Look yonder between those two oaks. Can't you envisage a feminine form scarce venturing to step out of the darkness ? In those days they came at once."

"Sire," said Bellegarde. "Would you like to see my mistress ?"

"Who ? Where ?"

"She is very beautiful. The castle is not far away."

"What is her name?"—"Cœuvres." Quickly asked, promptly answered, and the King at once knew who was meant. "Cœuvres. Then she is a d'Estrées."

"Gabriclle," said the young man, and his heart lifted with the name. "Her name is Gabrielle, and she is ravishing. She is twenty, her hair is pure gold, brighter than the sunlight on these leaves. Her eyes are coloured like the sky, and I sometimes think they alone make the day beautiful. Her eyebrows are brown, and arched in twin delicate and noble curves."

"She'll shave them off," interposed the King, whereat the lover started, and fell silent. Such a notion had not come into his mind.

"Show her to me. To-day you are pledged to her. But next time take me with you."

"Sire, I will do so now." Bellegarde leapt up, he could not wait to show the King his lovely mistress. On the way they spoke of the family, and the King remembered.

"Your beauty's father is called Antoine, and would have been Governor of La Fère, had he not been turned out by the League. And the mother? Surely she ran away?"

"With the Marquis d'Alègre, years ago. Before she went, she is said to have tried to sell her daughter. But what does that prove? You yourself knew your predecessor's court, Sire."

"It left a good deal to be desired in the matter of morals. But your Gabrielle was too young to be sold."

"Sixteen, and as yet half grown. Even so I noticed her at once. But fortunately I did not get her until she was already ripe."

"Ah. . . . And her sister"; the King was searching his memory; "what was her name?"

"There are six sisters. But Your Majesty means the eldest, Diana. Her first lover was the Duke of Epemon."

The King had almost said: and all six, with the eldest, must have lain with a regiment between them. He called to mind that together they been known as the Seven Deadly Sins. But he observed:

"You have indeed become acquainted with an agreeable family, Feuilemorte. Will you marry Gabrielle?"

To which the Duke of Bellegarde answered with pride : "One of her ancestresses on the mother's side was honoured by Francis the First, Clement the Sixth, and Charles the Fifth. There loved her in succession, a King, a Pope, and an Emperor."

But the King had taken his mind off the gallant ladies from whom his follower's beloved claimed descent. The name of the Duke of Epernon had fallen from Bellegarde's lips, a name burdened with old conflicts, by no means yet composed. All the cares of his kingdom came upon the King, he let his horse drop to a walk despite his companion's impatience, and talked of his enemies. They had divided the kingdom among them, and each in his own province set up as an independent Prince, owing no obedience to the heretic King. Even Epernon, who had begun as one of the late King's boy favourites. "Bellegarde," he said at last. "You are a Catholic and my friend, tell me whether I must take this perilous leap."

The other understood, and answered : "Sire, you certainly need not change your religion. We serve you as you are."

"If that were only true," murmured the King.

"And you shall see my lady," cried his companion in high good humour. The King looked up. Beyond a wooded valley and a rippling stream, over hills and undulations of rich autumn foliage, above the treetops and against the blue of heaven, shimmered the castle. Thus do castles often look from far away, airy and insubstantial (before we come to know them), and their roofs a-glitter. What awaits us? Turreted and bastioned, with guns peering from the ramparts, and roses climbing up the walls. What awaited them here? Henri's gnawing anxiety about his enemies, his dread of apostasy, made him sensitive to first impressions. He stopped, said that it was late, and made as though to turn back. Bellegarde became imploring, eager to win his master's commendation for his in-

comparable possession. The King was told of wine-dark lips, and pearls that glittered from between them; cheeks like lilies and roses, with the lilies shining through, and a body no less white; a bosom of marble, the arms of a goddess, and the legs of a nymph.

The King yielded, and they rode on.

The castle was guarded by ramparts and a draw-bridge: a main block and two projecting wings, each with its little pierced turret. The central building was of two storeys, with a steep roof, open colonnade, huge doorway and carved window-frames. Originally a crude fortress, the castle had been elegantly rebuilt; and there were climbing roses everywhere, from which the last petals were fluttering down.

The King waited outside while his companion entered. At the far end of the vestibule rose the two arms of a curved staircase. The Duke of Bellegarde passed under it into a room filled with green light from the garden beyond. He reappeared in the company of a dark-haired young lady in a yellow gown embroidered with wreathed roses. Lightly she stepped ahead of the Duke, curtsied to the King, and from that modest attitude looked roguishly up at him. Her slitted eyes hinted to her lord that he need not take the lovely creature's modesty too seriously; nor did he so. He promptly said:

"You are indeed so ravishing, dear lady, that you must be the charmer on whose account my Master of the Horse comes hither so frequently. My expectations were not too high."

"Well spoken, Sire; pray continue. In the meantime your Master of the Horse is looking for my sister." Whereupon she drew back into the vestibule. The King followed.

"You are Diana!" he cried, with an air of astonishment. "So much the better. You are free. We shall understand each other." To which she, in a sharp staccato:

"I am never quite free. But he that wishes to understand me, must be experienced. Do you know how many women he must have had? Twenty-eight."

It was common report that the King had had just so many mistresses, not including fleeting encounters. She knew it, and was twitting him.

"Excellent," he observed, and thought of offering the girl a rendezvous. But at that same moment a figure appeared at the head of the staircase.

Her foot hovered on the topmost step. She wore a green velvet gown, stretched over a swaying hoop. From above, the reflection of the falling dusk shimmered on her golden hair and the pearls interwoven in its coils. The King stepped forward, stopped, and his arms dropped to his sides. O the unimagined magic of that descending form ! She moved like a fairy, like a Queen, thought the King ; as though he had never known ugly queens, but he felt like a King in a fairytale. And yet, as fairy and as queen, she moved with easy childish nonchalance. One of her hands lay at her pearl necklace, the other slid down the balustrade,—as when a lissom body droops and falls, each step a miracle of ease and grace, poise and dignity, all in one. The King had never seen the like.

He stood in the shadow ; she did not know it, or she was not looking for him. She had missed Bellegarde, who had dashed too quickly up the wrong arm of the staircase ; she laughed at him, and turned her head with naive vivacity. Forgetting where she was, she sprang up two steps and would have run into her lover's arms. At a sign from him, she stopped, and continued her radiant progress. The King did not wait for her, he had stepped slowly backwards, and when she reached the bottom of the stair, he found himself outside the doorway.

From the very centre-point of his being a sob burst upwards, and when it reached his throat, it choked his speech. When Gabrielle d'Estrées was presented to him, he was dumb. The Master of the Horse dropped the girl's hand and recoiled. He knew what he had done. The King could not utter, he seemed stricken and shattered—horror-struck, as Bellegarde could not but think, and looked at his lady's face—had it changed into a Medusa's

head? No, she was still a girl like any other, though lovelier indeed, as Bellegarde knew best of all. His pride of ownership did not prevent him thinking that the impression she had made upon the King was exaggerated, apart from the fact that it was dangerous.

Gabrielle drooped her brown eyelashes, which were long and shadowed her shining cheeks. Not a look nor a smile could suggest to the King that her modest demeanour was feigned. Here was a woman that neither wished to please him nor stir his curiosity,—as if a white and fair-haired goddess could be so demure. Was she conscious of it? Then he was indifferent to her. The King sighed; he begged the divine apparition not to constrain herself on his behalf, and made a movement towards his Master of the Horse, who took the girl's hand and led her a few steps further, where petals were still fluttering down from the roses by the wall.

"Sire," said Diana. "You will now be blind to all my charms, but I am a good sister."

He asked hurriedly whether, beside the two of them, there were others at home. She answered—No; her father had ridden out, and her aunt was paying a visit in the coach. Her aunt? He lifted his eyebrows. Madame de Sourdis, she said, and no more was needed; he was well acquainted with his kingdom. Madame de Sourdis, sister of Gabrielle's fugitive mother, and herself a woman of gallantry; betraying Monsieur de Sourdis with the late King's deposed Chancellor, Monsieur de Cheverny. Monsieur de Sourdis, formerly Governor of Chartres, in the same case as Monsieur d'Estrées: without a place. All of them were without places, they would want a great deal of money. The affair would be a costly one,—thought the King, but did not dwell on the point. Why struggle against the inevitable?

While Diana went on talking, he stared, with set eyes as in battle, across at Gabrielle, and his lips moved; he felt in the depths of his being that this was she.

. . . This is she, and I must needs be forty before she

comes. They compare her with marble, they speak of purple or of coral, of the sun and the stars. Empty echoes, who can give a name to what is nameless, saving only I? Who but I can possess the infinite? Goddess or fairy, what is she? Queen I will not call her. All my life long I have sought, and never found, and this is she. . . .

Even when talking to Bellegarde she kept her air of modesty, or was it merely coldness? The expression in her eyes was baffling; there was a promise in them, but what they promised was uncertain. She does not love Fcuillemorte, said Henri, despite of his tormenting jealousy. But did she notice me? Her eyes are still downcast. Now she bends her face over a rose: I shall never forget the turn and droop of that fair head. She lifts her face—in a moment her eyes will be upon me. Ah no. Not again.

In two long strides he was before her, and said gladly: "The rose, mademoiselle. . . ."

"Would you have it?" asked Gabrielle d'Estrées courteously, but with a dimly haughty air: Henri observed it, and agreed that haughtiness suited her. He kissed the rose she handed him, and the petals dropped as he did so. Another gesture from the King dismissed Bellegarde; and Henri said eagerly:

"What do you think of me?"

That she had known some while before, for all her vague and poetical expression when she looked at him. But she answered:

"It would be more usual to say what you think of me."

"Have I not done so?" cried Henri.

He had forgotten that he had been speechless, and thought she must have understood.

"Charming Gabrielle," murmured the King to himself.

"Who told you so? Your eyes are not upon me," she answered calmly.

"I have already seen too much," he burst out—then he laughed lightly, and began to pay court to her, as indeed she expected. He was charming, he was bold, utterly the gallant King of eight and twenty mistresses; he upheld

his reputation. She held him off, but not without a touch of provocation, for courtesy's sake, and because it is pleasant when a man does not belie his fame. That was his sole success, and he knew it but too well. He felt duly abashed, but talked on and suddenly found himself asking after her mother. Her perfect face grew chill, indeed as marble, and she replied that her mother was absent. "At Issoire, with the Marquis d'Alègre," he added, as he had mentioned her, and in faint requital for her chill demeanour. At that same moment he realized that she must needs withdraw, and only did not do so because he was the King. But a look measured him from head to foot, and filled him with sudden weariness. What she had seen as her eyes travelled over his person, he followed, feature by feature, in his mind. A pendulous nose, he told himself more than once, and each time with more emphasis, as though that had been the worst. But there was more.

He looked round for Bellegarde, anxious to compare his own weathered countenance with that of his friend ; so handsome, so much taller,—and what teeth he had ! In his youth, as King of Navarre, Henri had had his teeth gilded ; which led, and always leads, to much trouble later on.

Diana looked at the King, and she said : "Sire, you would like to rest ? A room stands ready for the night. There are excellent carp in our pool for your supper."

"Give me bread and butter ; I'll kiss the hand that brings it me here outside the door, before I take my leave. I will enter Monsieur d'Estrées' house only in his company."

All this was addressed to Gabrielle, and she it was who went in to fetch what he had asked. The King sighed, in something like relief, whereat Bellegarde and Diana were much astonished.

Henri had hoped that Gabrielle would mount the stair and once again come down it. But she went in to one of the lower rooms and had soon returned. The King ate his bread and butter standing, while he talked and laughed,

and asked about the harvest and the local gossip. It was thus he would have passed the time with any of his subjects, the bakers at Mans, and the Knight of the Turkey. Then he, and his Master of the Horse, prepared to mount their horses. But he took his foot out of the stirrup, stepped up to Gabrielle d'Estrées, and spoke in a hurried whisper; his eyes were filled with fire and life, she had never met his like, and he meant to leave a memory behind him. "I shall come again," he said; "Dear love." He mounted and rode off, without a glance behind him.

When the horsemen had disappeared among the trees, Diana asked her sister what the King had said to her in secret. Gabrielle repeated it. "What!" cried Diana. "And it leaves you so unmoved! Conceive what this means! No more and no less than fortune! We shall all grow rich and powerful."

"For a light word that he spoke at parting."

"But spoken to you: whether you are worth it, to you he said it, and no other woman will hear the like from him so soon, although at least eight and twenty have heard it before. We are neither of us fools, and both of us marked him as he took the bait."

"With his rotten yellow teeth," added Gabrielle.

"Do you dare to say such a thing of a King!" said Diana, choking with indignation.

"O spare me," pleaded Gabrielle. "After all, he is old."

"I'm sorry for you," said her sister. "A man not yet forty—and a seasoned soldier. And such a firm, straight figure. . . ."

"His skin looks as though it had been smoked, and his face is seamed with wrinkles," observed the adored one.

"When a man spends his life campaigning, he has little time to trim his beard."

"His grey beard," added Gabrielle. Her sister cried out in a fury:

"And his neck was ill washed, if you want to know."

"Do you think I did not notice?" drawled Gabrielle. Diana was now quite beside herself.

"For that very reason I would have lain with him this night. Only a great conqueror and a famous man can permit himself such lapses."

"I am for more ordinary habits. The homage of a King of France is indifferent to me, when he wears a thread-bare doublet and a shabby hat."

Whereupon Gabrielle departed. Diana called after her, in a voice that rose into almost a shriek :

"You are thinking of that smooth-faced, scented nin-compoop of yours !"

And Gabrielle said, over her shoulder :

"You remind me. The King smells most unpleasantly."

A RIDE BY NIGHT

While the King and his nobleman were riding over the hills among the yellowing trees, the sky was red with the evening light. Then the forest rose up black before them. The King halted his horse and looked behind him at the castle, poised above the tree-tops. An afterglow from the sinking day lit the roofs with gentle radiance. Not long ago they had flashed and glittered, and had promised—what? he had been afraid. Which was reasonable enough ; indeed he never felt otherwise when riding into battle. But this time, he felt, he was to be worsted and taken prisoner. . . .

What in early years is divined by the light of instinct, is soon forgotten in the folly of experience. . . . My part, thought Henri, will this time be patience. Let us endure and close our eyes, we can do no other ; scarred as we are by experience, we cannot please at first encounter. That alone decides. Before all that was to befall me, before all the terror and the toil, as a youth of seventeen, I knew the gardener's daughter, Fleurette. It is dawn and the dew is shining on the grass. I have taken her and loved her,

our night was full of rapture, I still hold her hand, the spring mirrors both our faces ; and as quickly as the image in the water, love also had dissolved, I was already waving to her from afar, and my horsemen had carried me away. And now—the dark forest.

He rode into it. Bellegarde was far ahead of him, and Henri, quite alone, let his horse go forward at a walk. . . . I shall have to lay long siege to her, said he, and sieges are usually raised when enough time and men have been lost. Not this one, friend ; here is a frontier of your freedom, and you must rather bleed to death. . . . He shivered, reined in his horse, and peered into the darkness, to which his eyes were gradually growing accustomed. So grave a matter, and its aim was happiness ! But as the summons had come, happiness did indeed appear ; it set his heart throbbing, lightened his head, and he told himself that age was a delusion, and could only possess us by our consent. He would be happy, he would be seventeen again ; and the promise of happiness is to-day called Gabrielle. Take it ! Here's no place for doubt or modesty ; shake off your weariness and fight ! Remember the King of Navarre, a petty monarch who faced a sea of perils. But he had not been worsted nor would he be worsted now.

As he stood up in his stirrups to clear his lungs, he caught sight of a motionless rider in the distance, at the end of a long forest track, overhung by branches ; but between the foliage and the shadow, far away and very small, Henri could descry that mounted statue. This was the man she loved. . . . 'Tis true, and I bow before the truth. But if he loved her, he would promptly slit my throat. Will he not ? Then I am the stronger, being King. He is handsome and he is young ; kill me, Feuilemorte, or you will lose your lady. She will not always think me old and ugly, I'll take care of that, Feuilemorte. My beard is grey, but that makes no matter, for I myself am as young as any man. She will learn, however much it costs me ; and though I must give and give again, and sue and plead

and supplicate ; in the end she will not love you any more, Feuilemorte : she will love me. . . .

He rode up to the silent horseman, and leaned out of his saddle. "Bellegarde ! Wake up. What do you mean to do ? "

"Sire, to accompany you, unless you wish to be alone."

Henri was amazed to hear a calm and courteous voice. . . . What ! Did the storm not touch him, was it only I that was so shaken ? I'll break his complacency at least. . . .

"I am growing old," said the King, as they rode on. "It is to be marked from the way in which women have latterly encountered me. One, if you can believe me, had me to sit at a table laid for twenty absent guests, while she crept out of the house and drove away. That shows a man his place, and so it was to-day. You can be content. Are you content ? " repeated the King, as no answer came. A confession of jealousy. The King had triumphed.

"It was your own wish, Feuilemorte. You insisted I should see your lady, and would have shown her to me in her bath. She is truly white and rosy, as you said. More white than rosy, indeed. Never have I looked on anything so white, so shining, and never in one glance alone did I compass such a vision of joy. What a pity I am old."

The words were spoken in regret (if not in deep design). Bellegarde, as he listened, felt the more certain of his happiness, which was a reality and no mere vision. "Indeed I am happy," cried Bellegarde, his face upturned to the silent treetops. And without a pause he went on in an undertone :

"I have the loveliest lady in the world, I am Master of the Horse in France, thirty years old, not ill-looking, and the evening is delightful. I have the honour to be riding beside the King. Sire, you would like to rob me of my lovely lady, which would be the highest honour for your nobleman. But Gabrielle d'Estrées loves me, and you would be betrayed."

"You will be forgotten," said Henri in the same low tone,

"I am her first," said Bellegarde. "Even at the court of the late King, when she was sixteen, we fell in love. The King made us dance together, both wearing the same colours. Glad I am that we then resisted our desires. I had laid no finger on her, but, she was mine, and not for the Cardinal of Guise nor the Duke of Longueville. The flight of the King from Paris parted us for three years, and by mere accident, I found her here again : but are there such accidents ? "

Too consequential, thought Henri and longed to interpose. Much too long and consequential ; but he said nothing. As the forest darkened, Bellegarde did but plunge with more abandonment into the silent rapture of his happiness.

"I was told she was in Cœuvres. I rode there—she was standing in the hall. A look ; and it was decided. She had waited for me three years long, I was still her first. The aunt was on the watch, I paid her, and the door of her room was not locked that night. The staircase led up into a pierced turret on the side wing—and there I slept with her that night." Bellegarde stopped, sobered by the last words, fell silent, and his lips no doubt were set.

"Is that all ?" asked Henri, rather taken aback, for it was surely entertaining to pay the aunt and sleep with the niece.

"I have said too much," said Gabrielle's lover. So Henri felt ; he was ashamed to have listened to it all. His intended victim's confidences put him out of countenance. For he had already forgotten what, in the moment of clear vision, he had foreseen that enterprise would cost him ; humiliations of every sort, deliberate blindness, and decencies defied.

The ride came to a clearing, the one indeed where their adventure had begun ; it lay flooded in moonlight. Each suddenly noticed that his companion had grown pale and grave ; then Bellegarde, in that deep solitude, fell to talking like a courtier.

"Sire," said he ; "Pray do not ask me to boast of my youth. A happy King is young at forty. I perhaps am so for the last time to-day."

"You are uncommonly yellow, Feuillermorte. The moonlight does not favour your colour. Health counts as well as youth. You should take a cure, Feuillermorte."

CHARMING GABRIELLE

Wherever Henri travelled and sojourned, he had to keep an eye open for enemies, now and always. One day a peasant made his way between two enemy forces. With a straw mattress on his head he tramped four miles through the forest, reached the castle of Cœuvres, crossed the bridge into a courtyard—when a maid cried out to him. "Stop, fool! The kitchen is at the back!" Something was thrust into her hand, the man whispered in her ear, she gaped and turned and went. Out of the house came Gabrielle d'Estrées.

She saw before her a stocky peasant, grey of beard, with a lined and blackened face, like all his kind. "What do you want?"

"I bring a message for you, Mademoiselle, from a lord who will not be named."

"Speak, man, or go." She herself had just turned to go, when she caught the fire and intelligence in the man's eyes. Was that a peasant? Where had she seen those eyes before? Surely she had marked them then!

"Sire!" she cried, started back, and said in a low voice: "How dreadful you look!"

"I had announced myself."

"In such a guise! Do I not deserve that you should come in silk and velvet, and with an escort?"

Henri laughed into his grey and dusty beard. Ah! He had been too old for her. This peasant was older than a King can ever be. He had won his way so far. Yet a little while, and when he came in grand array, she would find him handsomer than Feuillermorte.

Gabrielle eyed the house uneasily; the windows were still empty. "Come, I will show you the carp pond."

She ran, and he strode after her, until they were both behind the house. Henri laughed into his beard. Already she was vain of her royal suitor, never would she show him to her family as a grimy peasant. He went on.

Behind the buildings the garden sloped steeply down, and so was admirably concealed from observation. A broad staircase strewn with yellowed leaves led through a tangle of foliage to the pool below. In two or three sudden leaps Henri was at the bottom. There he stood, a stiff straight figure, no longer a stocky peasant, and waited for Gabrielle to walk down, as on the first occasion, when she had set down her foot and trodden on his heart.

At the top she paused, then placed her foot on the first step. One of her hands lay at her pearl necklace, the other slid down the balustrade. Her long brown eyelashes were lowered. She moved. The miracle of ease and grace, poise and dignity, was again presented. His heart throbbed, the tears welled into his eyes. This, he felt, was a picture that would never fade. When she approached, the drooping eyelids still veiled her eyes. But when the blue eyes opened, they held all their magical uncertainty. Did she know, or did she not—what she was doing !

Henri asked no questions. He gazed at her hair and at her face. The sifted light from a cloudy sky lent a radiance, a limpid grace to her golden hair, and a suave, bewitching whiteness to her skin ; he shook his head.

"Sire, Your Majesty is displeased with your servant," said Gabrielle d'Estrées, with elaborate humility, and bent her knee in half a curtsy. Henri shot out a hand to raise her ; and grasped her arm. For the first time he felt her skin.

Henri felt her skin, and remembered two experiences, which he would never have dared confess to her. The first : a balustrade of delicate old marble, warmed by the sun, at Nérac in his native South. He stroked it and he felt at home. The second : a horse of youthful days, whose vivid, rippling hide he caressed in the ecstasy of possession,

"Be careful, Sire, your hands are dirty."

He took his hand away, it left a black mark behind. Henri laid his lips to the place, but that she would not allow; she had her handkerchief. But when it touched his face, it too was stained, like the arm. "Really!" she cried, with an ungracious laugh; but he, for one moment, was lost in a world of infinite adoration. Her skin beneath his lips: Gabrielle d'Estrées, her skin that he was kissing, tasted like the flowers and the ferns in his native mountains. Such too was the taste of the sun and the eternal sea—hot and bitter; he loved creation in its toil and sweat. In it all things were contained, even—and here he muttered 'God forgive me!'—even God Himself.

Then he marked her ungracious smile, and he too laughed, a soft low laugh, whereby he recovered her good graces. And they went on laughing for no reason, like two children, until Gabrielle laid her hand upon his lips. As she did so, she flung a glance round—with that entrancing little tilt of the head—as though their odd behaviour might have been observed. She merely meant that he should realize the secrecy of their encounter, as indeed he understood. So he asked her confidentially about her aunt de Sourdis, and what her likings were—whether for jewels, silk or money.

"A place for Monsieur de Cheverny, I should think," said Gabrielle coolly. "And one for Monsieur de Sourdis," she continued, as the thought came into her mind. Then she paused for a moment, but added quietly: "I would also a place for Monsieur d'Estrées, who has been in a shocking ill humour of late. As for myself I don't know which I like best—jewels, silk, or money."

Henri assured her that next time he would come duly provided. But if he were to appoint the three gentlemen in question to Governorships, he would have to make some conquests first: of cities, and broad lands—and of a certain sleeping chamber, towards which he waved a hand.

"The staircase leads into a pierced turret on the side wing. . . . There I slept with her," he said abruptly,

and the voice was that of his Master of the Horse. Gabrielle recognized it, and bit her lips until they hid her little glittering teeth. Henri, with still sceptic eyes, watched Gabrielle : she was indeed as lovely as the day, a first eternal day. Not till that instant had he marked the delicate curve of her nose ; and what eyelashes had ever been so long and richly brown ! O the slim high curves of the twin brows ! Shave them off indeed !—perish the thought.

Gabrielle d'Estrées dismissed him across the fields behind the castle, to avoid encounters. And as he again slipped in peasant guise through the enemy lines, his mind was set, not on the allurements of Cœuvres, but solely on the prospect of taking Rouen. The League had sent a captain to command that lovely city—a man, indeed, whose wits had been stricken years before on the night of Saint Bartholomew, and who was now quarrelling with the citizens instead of fortifying and provisioning the place. The King would have had to expend the utmost of his strength on the taking of Rouen, but he knew it and had proclaimed his purpose. When he resolved upon another plan, questions were asked ; nor was it long before the answer was discovered in the Houses of d'Estrées and de Sourdis, and in her that was their crowning glory. Then the King rode openly and with a splendid retinue to Cœuvres.

On the very first occasion all awaited him in full muster, for they had been duly summoned : Madame de Sourdis in a stiff hooped frock, Messieurs d'Estrées, de Sourdis, de Cheverny, and six daughters, of whom only Diana and Gabrielle remained. The younger ones knew that grave matters were on hand, looked roguish, and romped away.

Madame de Sourdis accepted with much gravity the bag which the King produced from beneath his short red cloak. It was a small leathern sack, she emptied it into her hand, and for the first time her face lit up, as she eyed the promising little heap of jewels. She took them as a Royal pledge that still larger ones would follow—in due time, as she confidently observed. During this opening transaction

the lady faced the King alone, in the centre of the great hall that led from the ground-floor into the garden ; there looked down from the walls busts of many a Marshal of that House, the weapons they had carried, and the banners they had taken, arranged in elaborate trophies.

The King began to wonder where all this would lead. Rosny had reluctantly lent him these few sapphires and gold topazes. Here was a terrible woman, with a truly basilisk eye. Shrunken and withered—the very pattern of the female poisoner. A bird-like face—and whiter than any face he had ever seen, he reflected with some horror ; it was only too clear that all the women of this family were thus endowed ; and what made one desirable, in others spoke of poison and of death.

The lord of that castle had a bald pate, which flushed red at every surge of feeling. He was an honest old gentleman, and much given to hunting. Sourdis was short, broad-beamed and quite devoid of shame, despite a mask of geniality. Cheverney, the deposed Chancellor, looked all the taller. He overtopped the company, and here counted for a personable man, though elsewhere his sallow, parchment-like skin would have been ill viewed. He was indeed the most elaborately dressed, which could be accounted to his relations with the lady of the castle.

Henri took in the three noblemen at a glance. His experience of men was wide and sound. But the women ? Time would show. They always wear a mask at first ; and what we see is partly what they mean we should see, and partly what we imagine. Gabrielle stood hand in hand with her sister Diana. A family group, modest and delightful. Henri had almost forgotten that here was a desired woman, incomparable in the splendour of her loveliness, the goal of life, the very embodiment of love. Surely we hold it in our hand until the last moment, and can at will draw back.

All of which was known to a woman like Madame de Sourdis. With a sweep of her hand across the great panniers of her gorgeous gown, she motioned to the pair to stand

apart. Gabrielle dropped Diana's hand and went to Henri. At first he said nothing, he had seen a new vision of his love ; so would it rise upon him every day, as punctual as the sun. Draw back—never !

In the meantime the hall was becoming crowded. The door stood open and the outer door as well ; and, through the vestibule the coaches could be seen in endless succession. Lords and ladies from all the neighbouring castles had come in their most magnificent attire, as to a betrothal ; and they thronged the walls, whispering excitedly as they watched what the King was doing. He raised the hand of the lovely d'Estrées nearly to the level of her lips, and slipped a ring upon her finger,—not indeed a ring that would have much delighted any of the ladies there. A narrow hoop adorned with a few roses, such as a younger son might well have presented to a poor step-daughter. This done, the hostess waved a staff to the lackeys as a signal for refreshments. Syrups, almond milk, sweetmeats and Turkish honey made their solemn entry, and tables loaded with pasties and wine were set out under the eye of a portly cook, in response to the curt motions of Madame de Sourdis' staff, which she brandished in the fashion of a fairy. She turned her head, just as Gabrielle did—but what was so entrancing in Gabrielle was, in her, absurd, and merely roused disgust. Such opposites are never far apart.

Lured by the lavish feast, the guests forgot their diffidence and jostled for places. The more distinguished induced the King's gentlemen to present them, and assured him of their loyalty, which was needful enough, as it was not long since they had stood in arms against him. Although this was plainly to his profit, he merely observed that all good Frenchmen recognized and served him ; then he left them standing, and talked only with the Duke of Longueville. He was Gabrielle's other suitor ; she had hovered—perhaps indeed she was still hesitant—between him and Feuillermorte. So it seemed from their expressions. Longueville wore his hair bleached, and his face was girlish, as

had been the fashion at the late King's court. But he was brave, and once when in a lady's company he had, though clad only in a shirt, cut down the intrusive husband. The King made him tell the story, and Gabrielle d'Estrées withdrew in dudgeon. She could well plead that she had been carried away by the throng, as it surged through the hall, struggling for a glimpse of the King, or for something to eat. Jostling figures, the haze andreck of a great assembly, nodding plumes, and here and there the odd appearance of a neck poised on a starched ruff, that seemed to float bodyless through the room.

The King himself, carried with the throng, soon found himself at the far end of the hall, which was kept free by a ring of sturdy retainers. There the hostess waited with raised staff, as though her magic had conjured the King thither. He was placed at a table by himself. D'Estrées, de Sourdis and de Cheverny served him standing; the first with wine and melons, the second with a fat carp, and the third with game pasty stuffed with truffles. The King was suddenly seized with violent hunger, but he first commanded that Gabrielle d'Estrées should be seated at his side. She was not to be found. Her father bent over the King, as he filled his glass, and said with honest anger, as his bald pate flushed: "Sire, my house is no better than a brothel. If I were to go through the bed-chambers of this castle at night, to avenge the honour of the family, there would be no survivors. But 'tis not to my purpose that it should die out. My sole comfort is the adulterous pair at Issoire."

He was referring to his wife and the Marquis d'Alègre. The King asked the old gentleman what he meant. Monsieur d'Estrées answered that, in the city where he was governor, his extortions to satisfy the insatiable Madame d'Estrées had made him detested; and the end would certainly be disaster. Then came the carp. Monsieur de Sourdis, who served the King, spoke of no family troubles despite the sprouting horns so clearly visible on his brow. No, his sole care was for the city and domain of Chartres.

There he had once been in authority, and there too his friend Cheverny had been Governor, before they were both driven out by increasing lawlessness and the collapse of the Royal power. In the carp's opinion—for Monsieur de Sourdis closely resembled one—the capture, not of Rouen, but of Chartres, was much the most urgent matter ; with which verdict the erstwhile Chancellor, who replaced the carp and laid before the King a truffled venison pie, heartily agreed. This lantern-jawed official was not merely proficient at his table duties, he knew the Royal mind and inclinations, and what he said and did was well considered.

"Sire !" he observed in a tone of grave insistence, "you could force your city of Rouen to surrender, and thus once for all secure your province of Normandy. But it would be a bloody victory. Your Majesty yourself has said that it vexed your soul to see your subjects lying on the battlefield, and where you won, there too you lost. But a high officer of State, well known thereabouts, might well induce the burghers of Chartres to submit to your authority." He knew where the King's inclinations lay, and he had a dignified utterance.

It was now the turn of Madame de Sourdis ; at a wave of her staff a huge covered dish was carried forward, and when the silver lid was lifted the roguish creature came forth in the guise of a living Cupid, one finger at the corner of her mouth, roses in her hair, and a quiver stuffed with arrows. While the room grew clamorous with admiration of the lovely archeress, Madame de Sourdis, red-haired and topped by her twin feathers, one red, one yellow, raised her staff before the King, and said : "Shall I lower it ? Chartres for Monsieur de Sourdis, and for Monsieur de Cheverny the Royal seal."

Scarce a flicker stirred the King's eyelids, but Madame de Sourdis saw it. She lowered her staff, and there beside the King and very close to him, sat the charming Gabrielle.

VALLEY OF JEHOSEPHAT

To the East of the city of Jerusalem, where it stands over against the open Mediterranean, and the not far distant Dead Sea, lies the Valley of Jehosaphat. It is, in fact, the low ground between the circle of the city wall and the Mount of Olives. We know the land, we know the valley, and all too well the Garden of Gethsemane. The truly devout will be buried nowhere but in the Valley of Jehosaphat, for there the trumpet of resurrection and of judgment will be first heard, when the day comes and it is sounded forth. But among the trees of this garden, on this very soil, our Lord was tempted. Judas meant to betray him, as indeed he knew, for his own weakness had taught him how prone were men to fall away from God. He did not want to die, and in the Garden of Gethsemane, with drops of anguish on his brow, He spoke to God : O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me ? : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Valley of Jehosaphat was the name given to the Royal camp before Chartres, and when one day the King, covered with mire, was clambering out of the trenches, whom did he see approaching on a litter ? Henri ran like a boy to help Gabrielle alight ; in doing which, he had almost forgotten the Lady de Sourdis ; both, escorted by the King, made their way into the valley of Jehosaphat. Gabrielle wore her green velvet gown, that went so well with her fair golden hair. She tripped through the mire in her little red morocco shoes, but on her face there was a smile of victory. A rambling old tavern was set in order for the King's lady ; she made no attempt to withhold herself, but that very night she received an ardent and devoted lover.

She did so because her more experienced aunt de Sourdis told her it would profit her, and that the King was a man to pay after the event, which would indeed serve only to intensify his passion. The astute old lady proved to have judged rightly, and the first to profit by the affair was

Dame Sourdis herself, as her old friend Cheverny received the seals from the King, and was appointed Chancellor. Misfortune long drawn out makes for unbelief. When that gaunt official, a creature of old Catherine de Medici who had planned the Night of Saint Bartholomew, came into the presence of the Protestant King, his brow was damp with sweat, for he thought that all this would prove no better than a farce, and that he would soon be privily removed : such would have been the view in his own day.

No one was in the King's immediate company, excepting only his First Chamberlain d'Armagnac, a grey-haired man, who had gone everywhere with his master for many years, to prison and to freedom, through mortal peril, and through his days of glory. He had saved his King's life, got him a crust of bread at need, and guarded him from harm, so far as it threatened him from men. He never warned him against women, for he himself, like his master, found no evil in women, save unloveliness. D'Armagnac actually admired Dame Sourdis for her red hair and her bold blue eyes, which compelled the admiration of a cavalier from the South. Hence his favour had been won for Monsieur de Cheverny, and he was concerned that Dame Sourdis' friend should be well received by the King. At a curt gesture from Henri, d'Armagnac took the seals and the keys from the table, and handed them to the King with all elaboration of a public ceremony. Henri could not but respond ; he embraced the Chancellor, paid him due compliments, and forgave him his old transgressions. "Now," said the King over his shoulder ; "the Chancellor will not aim these two pistols—by which I mean the seals—at me, but at my enemies."

Cheverny, brazen-faced as he was, stood aghast. From the far end of the room came much muttering and whispering, and, if ears did not deceive, the clash of weapons. Protestant gentlemen they were, and it was not only this performance that had roused their wrath : they disliked the presence of two ladies in the camp of Jehosaphat. It galled them to think that on their account, the important

city of Rouen, had not been taken, and time was being thrown away before Chartres. They also feared yet worse disaster from the King's new passion, for they had no longer any confidence in his religion.

Having escaped the perils of that encounter, Monsieur de Cheverny remained for a while quite bewildered ; his friend Dame Sourdis made clear to him who wielded power in Jehosaphat. Not, indeed, the Pastors. But the pair agreed that Gabrielle should have none but Protestants in her service. She herself admitted it was best. For the rest, she danced. Every evening there was feasting and dancing in Jehosaphat, it was indeed a truly festal siege. Then, when all had gone to bed, the King rode out on picket with a hundred horsemen. His night was brief, the sun found him at his labours, and in the daytime he hunted, —all this because the presence of his lady robbed him of his rest, as none had ever done before, and stirred his strength and energy beyond all earlier experience. And he grew the more impatient, when the beleaguered city would not fall. Gabrielle, as he well knew, had followed worldly counsel, not her own heart, when she yielded.

Henri swore that this should not continue, for women act from many different motives ; with them, calculation does not preclude feeling. Forty years had taught him that. At twenty he would scarce have had dealings with a lady encumbered by a horde of greedy kinsfolk. He would never have troubled to appear before her—first as a little old peasant, to whom she had said : “ How dreadful you look ” ; then in Royal array, and then as a soldier, imperious, resourceful, and alert. But at last she should see the conqueror. To him her heart would certainly succumb, for women dream of men that conquer, and for such they readily forget a young Master of the Horse. Then she would be his, and the battle over.

Chartres fell at last, for the Royalists had driven their trenches up to the very walls. They carried one outwork after another, then the citadel and the city, and in this fashion Henri also mastered Gabrielle, who did not love

him even yet, when she shared a room with him in the tavern of the Iron Cross. The sight of his unwearied energy carried an outwork of her heart, and he had reason to believe that he would penetrate the innermost citadel, when he took possession of Chartres. And that was on the twentieth of April, a glorious day—pealing bells, streets beflagged, children strewing flowers, chanting priests, the mayor with the keys, and four magistrates carrying a canopy, from beneath which the King, erect upon his horse, surveyed his city ; which, in the very hour of conquest, cheered his entry.

The solemn reception took place in a famous church of pilgrimage, and there, for all to see, sat the radiant lady whom he loved, with all her retinue ; the King displayed his majesty before her, and a side-glance or two convinced him that her heart was melted. Suddenly, and oddly, she blushed and bit her lip—and a quizzical look came into her eyes. Then, by ill luck, the King descried a figure lurking behind her in the shadow ; someone he had not encountered for a long while, and whose name he never spoke. And there he skulked. Henri, in his first fury, beckoned to all his Protestants ; they forced a passage for him, and he hurried to sermon in a certain house of ill repute. True it was that his Pastor had been assigned no other resort in which to serve his God ; a common haunt of actors, pimps and thieves. The King preferred it to the company of decent people ; but there was so much indignation that he did well to leave Chartres.

Before doing so he composed his quarrel with Gabrielle, who swore that his eyes had deceived him, that the nobleman in question could not possibly have been in the church, or she must have known ! This was her best plea, and he was minded to accept it, though its weakness was all too plain. What told him that she had not known ? Not that errant, limpid look in her blue eyes—for that said : Beware ! No matter, he acquiesced, just because she was still not solely his, and the battle for her must continue.

She retired to Cœuvres, where he visited her, and Mon-

sieur d'Estrées announced that his visits affected the honour of his house. Both spoke as man to man. "How did you yourself describe your house yourself?"

"As a brothel," growled the old gentleman. "Common noblemen had abused it. There was wanting but a King, and him we have."

"Friend, you had better have come with your daughter to Chartres. You could have kept your eyes open: and you would now have been Governor of Chartres. Monsieur de Sourdis is Governor in your stead, but he is disliked for being so ugly, and he has taken to peculation—there's more of the pike than the carp about him now. I need good honest men, my friend."

"Sirc, I long to serve the King, if I may likewise preserve the purity of my house."

"There will be time," said the King. "Will you begin in my company?"

"I will," replied Monsieur d'Estrées, and his bald pate flushed.

The King rode away without having seen his beloved, and as he rode he pondered on the Queen of England's offer: three or four thousand soldiers, with pay for two months, and a small fleet—if he set about besieging Rouen in good earnest. That was her condition, natural enough from an old woman, who lived solely for power; other salvation had she none. The King spurred his horse into a gallop, leaving his astonished escort far behind, and rejoicing in his lithe limbs: far away in England sat an old grey woman.

Elizabeth, now in the high fifties, had executed favourites, from mere apprehension of their power, and had treated her Catholics no otherwise. Henri had never sacrificed a woman, and indeed he had often spared his would-be murderers. He had beaten no Armada, certainly; he had dealt the World Power no such blow. And though Elizabeth were near sixty, her people did not see her age; she appeared before them on a palfrey, in the guise of a mighty Queen, as comely as she had ever been. Elizabeth

knew one will and one alone ; nothing could break it, neither love nor mercy. And Henri reflected that the title "Great" would befit him not at all.

His horse had dropped into a walk. No ; "Great" he could not be called. But how much more time does a man of forty design to lose, before he sets about his business ? He was, as he well knew, in no hurry to deal with Rouen, he wanted to provide for Monsieur d'Estrées first. Which he promptly did. He took the town of Noyon, and installed Gabrielle's father as its Governor. That good honest man then felt impervious to dishonour. His daughter had confided to him that her purpose was to be Queen.

Her retinue was Protestant. She gave money to the Pastors for their heresy, and was herself already suspected of practising it. As the summer wore on, the King began to give her such large presents that enough was left for higher matters than her personal adornment. On the advice of her aunt de Sourdis, she approached the Consistorium and asked whether they were prepared to dissolve the King's marriage. If not, the emissaries pointed out, it was to be feared that the King would abjure his religion. He would thereby at once get possession of his capital, and therewith power enough to induce the Pope to agree to whatever he wanted,—nay more, to whatever Dame Sourdis and her lantern-jawed satellite suggested. For Henri in his passion was oblivious of the world that summer. An uneasy condition of affairs.

He was active enough, as always, in daily business ; but he was almost unheeding of what lay further ahead, and as most of the decisions had been taken, he let them stand. Is there a man proof against respites, distractions and indulgences ? Perhaps not, but a man certain of his cause, should thus gain resolution for the next leap. With women this is not so : their hearts may be fatal to their calculations. The House of Sourdis made skilful use of their choice instrument, but she was not above feminine weaknesses. At Cœuvres, where none now lived save her retainers, she received Bellegarde.

From Noyon the English envoy wrote to his Mistress that the King could not tear himself thence owing to his passion for the Governor's daughter. More than once she had vanished from the town, and the King had no need to enquire after her, all was carried to his car : the first time, where she went, and the second time, what she did there. On her third excursion he himself followed her from a distance and unseen, for it was night. The hooves of his horse had been bandaged. Came a patch of moonlight, he halted in the shadow. She was driving a squat, low-hung cart, drawn by a ram, and her pleated cloak trailed along the ground behind her. With throbbing heart he watched the vision move through the white glare, and when she turned the corner of the forest track he rode across country until he came up with her again.

He reached Cœuvres from the fields at the rear, tethered his horse and crept into the dreaming summer garden, so lush with leafage that no lurker could need to fear discovery. But Henri smelt out his enemy. His senses were so sharpened by jealousy that in that dank and stagnant air, among all the exhalations of the teeming earth, he could scent a man. Thrust but one bush aside, and you will expose a malignant face ! Meantime, Bellegarde did not stir, he stood as still as Henri, while his lady glided down the stairway to the pool.

Not a sound stirred the night. The leaf that she had touched in passing, still rustled, as she stopped and peered down into the darkness. The long steps lay half in shadowed blackness and half in harsh white light. There was silver in the folds of her cloak ; and the hand that held it at her throat was set in silver. A great hat, her protector on unlawful ways, shaded her face to her chin, which gleamed white beneath it. O pale betrayal ! O woman in the night, magical and treacherous both ! Tears welled into Henri's eyes and blinded him, he leapt from behind the bushes, took three steps at one stride, and had her in his arms before she could escape. He laid his head on her

shoulder, and said between his teeth : " Would you run away, dear love—from me ? "

She tried to control herself, but her voice still quavered. " But you took me so utterly by surprise, my lord ? "

He paused before he answered, listening. Her face, as he could see, was drawn and tense. " Surely we know each other to the bone, sweetheart," said he in a romantic tone, that took its colour from the night and their uneasy hearts. " Does not the magic mirror of our fond foresight show us both where each of us may be, and what each of us is doing ? "

" Yes—yes, indeed it so, my lord,"—but she did not hear her words. Her ear was set to catch the crackling of a twig ; it grew fainter, and then ceased. She breathed a sigh of relief.

Henri knew as well as she who had then departed. " Sweet sigh ! Enchanting pallor ! Deny no more that you are here on my account. We could not fail to come together. Are we not one of the eternal pairs of lovers, around them the world may fall to ruin, all unheeded : Héloïse and Abélard, Helen and Paris."

She was terrified that he might conceive the notion that his part was now not Paris, but Menelaus. This brought a smile to her face, she shot an ironic glance at him from under her large hat and said : " I am cold, let us go."

He took her fingertips and led her lightly up the garden stair, across the sleeping courtyard, and to the little pierced turrets on the left. Not until she reached her room did Gabrielle recover consciousness of her surroundings, and as there was nothing to be done, she quickly threw off all her garments and slipped into bed. Beneath it, on the floor, lay her other visitor—which a sensible lady could hardly be expected to foresee. Only a man himself possessed by passion could understand his rival's rash impulse, and guessed that he would not resist it ; he carefully surveyed the room as he entered. The bed stood in the full moonlight.

Henri lay down beside Gabrielle, and she took him

affectionately into her lovely arms. As she reached them out to him, he observed for the first time that they were slightly too short. And what most infuriated him was that his rival could also see that defect. After love-making they felt hungry, and opened a box of sweetmeats which Henri had brought. Both stuffed their mouths full and said nothing. Meantime Gabrielle was aware of a sound that was not the chewing of her companion. In her alarm she stopped eating, and stiffened. "Take some more," said he. "Are there ghosts in your turret? Don't mind their groans, I have a naked weapon ready to hand."

"O my dear lord, 'tis terrible. Night after night I have had to sleep with the maid-servants at the back of the castle, when this groaning began." This time she felt no desire to laugh. Henri said: "I wonder if it may be the ghost of Feuilemorte? It is long since I have seen him, he may be dead. However, ghost or man, we all must live," he said, and threw some sweetmeats under the bed. Both waited—and from beneath the bed came a sound of grinding teeth; which suggested wrath rather than satisfaction.

"Let us fly!" begged Gabrielle trembling and clutching him in her arms.

"How can I, if you will not let me out of bed?"

"Take me with you—I'm afraid. Open the door, I'll throw your clothes out to you."

She climbed across him, and seized him by the arm: "Don't look under the bed!" she implored in terror-struck tones. "That would be fatal."

"Ghosts are not my worst enemies." The agony that now struck at his heart made his speech indistinct. "I'm very ready to believe in ghosts. What I may not believe and will not know, is the past, that for you was flesh and blood, and still perhaps lives in your thoughts."

"For God's sake, let us fly!"

"I know all about you: Feuilemorte, Longueville, and what came before them. When the late King was sick of you, he sold you to the Levantine money-lender, Zamet."

He could have added to the tale, though he believed in none of them, it was torment that forced his speech. But she fell at his feet, clasped his knees, and held them until he got out of the bed, and even so remained crouching on the floor so that her body prevented him seeing beneath it. He dressed without a glance at the bed. Then he put her cloak about her shoulders, and carried her down the winding staircase, back across the courtyard, through the garden and into the open fields, where his horse was waiting. He set her before him on the saddle. In the silence of the night, and above the pad of muffled hooves on the soft earth, Gabrielle caught some whispered words: "No matter. I know. Temptation, trial, and a heavy hour. But I'll win you yet, sweetheart."

CATHERINE ONCE MORE

The garden at Cœuvres was sunk in summer, and Henri, so to say it, in his love, a condition in which no man sees further than he sets his foot. But this tangle of emotion cleared as the seasons turned, and the King pursued his affairs again with even more energy than before, several at once, and with the clearest vision, despite shocks that might have made him lose his head. A blow from blue heaven was his beloved sister's sudden scheme to abandon and betray him, and get her adored Soissons crowned King; instead of brother Henri, she herself and her good spouse would be upon the throne. When Henri heard of this, he hit out in all directions. He threatened death to all who had a finger in the business. He commanded his sister to appear at his campaigning Court; if she did not come, he would have her fetched.

He would have her brought by force from their old home, Béarn, where she had been plotting secretly against him, not merely in the matter of her marriage to her cousin Soissons. Then there had been attempts to murder her own brother, as she must admit. What sort of doings were

these, as between a brother and sister grown up in company, and linked together at perilous passages when there had been no handhold anywhere? When all was said, whom had the children of Queen Jeanne, save each other? Amazing as it was, Henri here forgot Gabrielle d'Estrées, the cause of so much delusion and confusion, but what did that signify beside his little Kathrin's conspiracy?

He named her as he had done in childhood, and clapped his hands to his forehead. He kept his room while her coach rolled daily nearer, but at last he could endure no longer, and dashed forth to meet her. Yonder she must be—behind that little cloud of dust, all that was left of his earliest life, and if it vanished he would indeed be self-estranged. The dust-cloud opened, the coach halted. No one stirred, the escort of noblemen reined in their horses and watched the King step up to the carriage door.

"Madame, will you please to alight," he said in formal tones, and not until then did she appear. A farmstead stood among the fields not far away. They left all their attendants behind them on the high road, and made their way to thither. "How grim you look, sister," said Henri; "and I am so truly glad to see you."

It was kindly spoken and meant to cheer: not in the least as he had meant to speak. No answer came, but his sister turned her face towards him, and that was enough: he was shocked by what he saw. The searching light of the wide beclouded heaven revealed a careworn face, stricken by sorrows. The limpid girlish bloom—which for him would never fade—marred, but only on the surface, like a rose dimmed by showers: but only on the surface. He soothed his conscience, which had struck him at first sight of her. Old?—absurd! Age cannot touch us. . . . But age caught and gripped him in that moment: they were growing old.

Suddenly he admitted his own guilt, though he had just been pondering on hers. He ought to have had her married long before, and why not to Soissons? How long does the time for happiness endure? She had fought

against herself because he was a Catholic. Now he was soon to become a Catholic himself. Why torture ourselves? We are all comedians. *Totus mundus*— And the parts we are called upon to play are mostly farce.

They could see into the farmhouse, which was deserted. Henri wiped the bench outside the door, so that Catherine could sit on it. He himself sat on the table, a massy plank set upon unhewn balks fixed in the soil, and swung his legs.

"Why torture ourselves?" he repeated aloud. To speak of treachery would have been most unsuitable, and indeed quite false, as is sometimes recognized. "Sister," he began, "do you know that it was mainly from fear of you that I never dared abandon our religion. But for that, how easy it would all have been. Never could I have thought that you would do so yourself, and aspire to be a Catholic Queen."

He spoke lightly and kindly, indeed almost gaily; he must make her smile, even through her tears. In vain: her face remained set and rigid. "Brother, you have often disappointed me," said she, when at last she had to speak. His retort was prompt.

"I know. And yet I had the best intentions when at a good hour I proposed to our cousin the alliance with our family."

"You did so, to get his support, and when he no longer had a party to help him to the throne, you broke your word," she said sternly; her rising temper heartened her to speak her mind and speak it without mercy. She was the only living creature who could reach his inner self, otherwise he would have never discovered that he had indeed broken his word. It had not lain upon his conscience hitherto; merely incidental, like Soissons and all his business. The real peril had been the House of Lorraine, and the real peril still was the House of Hapsburg. The worthy cousin could be diverted by a light word: 'You shall have my sister.' Well, it had been spoken. At that time the Catholic gentlemen had been especially urgent that

Henri should make an end and abjure, or they threatened to put that cousin to the throne. An utter trifle, repeated Henri to himself; how otherwise could it so wholly have passed out of his mind? Now it reappears as treachery. Treachery indeed!

His sister nodded: she had read his thoughts. "Always your own advantage," she said—now no longer stern, but grave. "You are quite heedless of the happiness of others, and yet you are a kindly man—or what is called humane. But alas—forgetful."

"Things are so easily forgotten," he murmured. "Help me, dear sister," he pleaded, well aware that an appeal for help would be more effective than for forgiveness.

"What do you mean?" she asked, knowing what he would reply; for the same thought was in both their minds—the assembly of the States General in Paris.

He went on contemptuously: "My beaten friend Mayenne is making a mighty fluster, and sending messengers all over France to summon the States General, that the kingdom may decide between me and Philip of Spain. They are not content to lose battles."

"The Count of Soissons," said she, "may well be chosen, a Bourbon like yourself, but a Catholic already."

"Then I'll abjure before they do it, God help me!"

"Brother!" she cried in horror. She leapt up from her bench, and limping all too clearly now in her agitation, she hurried along the low wall of the farm to where a peach hung from a trellis; she picked it and brought it back to her brother. He kissed the hand from which he took it.

"In spite of all," said he, "we remain what we are."

"You surely do." She assumed the austere, aloof expression of feminine fastidiousness that always came into her face when talking of his love-affairs; and indeed it was thus she viewed her own delinquencies. "Once more you have a mistress who can twist you as she pleases. You will not abjure our religion to please the States General," she insisted, though in this she was somewhat less than

fair. "No. But let Mademoiselle d'Estrées lift one finger, and you would betray our beloved mother and the Admiral, and all of us, as we observe."

"Gabrielle herself is a Protestant," he replied, to save himself an explanation, for after all she did consort with Protestants.

Catherine grimaced. "An intriguer, who makes you many enemies. I am quite sure she wanted you to arrest me, and that it was at her instance I was summoned." She looked with indignation at the squalid farmyard, and the scattered poultry.

"She has never so much as mentioned the matter," he retorted vehemently. "She is a sensible woman, and devoted to my interests. You have behaved most treacherously to me, and your lover has left the army without leave."

His outburst promptly calmed her ; and he would have said no more. "Go on !" said she.

"And what is more, your marriage would put me in peril of my life,—is that enough ? If you have children, then there will be no end to the murderers on my track, so all men tell me. And the knife is my terror. God grant me death in battle."

"Beloved brother !"

She stepped towards him and clasped him in her arms ; he bowed his forehead on her shoulder. Her eyes were dry, the Princess of Bourbon wept less readily than her Royal brother ; nor had she his imagination, and the mortal peril that he feared from her marriage she regarded as a figment of her enemies. But the sorrow of that hour pierced the more deeply into her heart ; he, with his tear-blinded eyes, saw no mark of it on that age-stricken face.

She then reminded him of something that had happened long ago, just before the end of his captivity in the Louvre ; indeed it was just at the turn of events before his flight. He had come upon his sister Catherine in an empty hall, in the company of his double ; the same face and figure,

but what gave life and truth to both was the fact that the man was dressed exactly like Henri, and his sister was leaning on him just as she used to lean upon her brother in old days.

"I had dressed him up to look more like you than he really did," said she. And a now middle-aged Princess sitting in a farmyard added: "Pray eat that peach; I know you are longing to." He did so, sunk in meditation on the interplay of currents beneath the flow of daily life.

He threw away the peach stone; and said, still sunk in thought: "How otherwise could I have threatened death to those who might try to part us? It is not my habit to make such threats—and I would not—even to hold the throne, only for your sake."

Then brother and sister finished in the old familiar fashion a conversation that had reached its end, though leaving many doubts unsolved. Unconsciously they turned their hands palms upward; noticed what they done, and smiled; then the brother led his sister back across the fields.

Then Henri, as though he might be overheard from the road, whispered into Catherine's ear. "Believe nothing, Kathrin, of what I next shall do or say."

"You will not make her—Queen?"

This was the momentous question, which she had come from so far to ask; he evaded it, but in a fashion that made his meaning clear.

"You are the first."

The Princess bade her people turn her coach. The King stood silent, and they did so, despite the general surprise at having travelled so far for so paltry an encounter. The Princess with her ladies and with her negress, Melanie, climbed into it; the King shouted to the coachman to drive hard. Then spurred his horse up to the coach, leaned forward, grasped the Princess's hand, and so rode onwards for a while. Then, at the entrance to a wood, the road narrowed, and the King had to rein back. There he halted, watching the coach as it diminished

into the distance, nor did he turn until it disappeared in its cloud of dust.

AGRIPPA ONCE MORE

In such a press of affairs a man might easily have lost his head. The assembly of the States General in Paris, an agreeable medley of crazy sectaries, and the besotted agents of a World Power, now decrepit, but avid of her neighbour's territory until the very end. The great lords postured before an audience that was in fact the starving populace. O for a lawful King to divide the bread of France among them, and how they would have worked to earn it. The parts that we are called upon to play are mostly farce. Thus spoke an old friend of the King of France, now famous, called Montaigne. Never indeed did the King forget he had proclaimed himself no sceptic. No ; there are manifestations of the world that sicken us of indecision and destroy the quality of mercy. We must assail and master, even at the cost of blood, what the outer world is too prone to pardon, at least for a while. If not, we shall, for reasons of State, violate and abjure our very selves. God knows what may be the end. But we may deem it His command : we must not shrink, the abyss will soon be yawning at our feet : let us leap, while there's yet space to take that mortal leap.

Time then presses : what does Henri do ? He sends for his old friend d'Aubigné, his preacher sword-in-hand, his valiant better self ; psalms forever on his lips, head erect, and smiling the confident smile of those whose faith is firm. "I," the little man would say, "stand high in favour, and cannot be spared from the business of the State" ; but in his heart he sadly recognized that the last time had come : the last time when he would speak to his King face to face. Henri would soon take that mortal leap, and his old friends would be left behind, his friends of battle and of poverty, and of the Religion.

Bluff Agrippa used his privilege of speaking to the King : he spoke what was in his mind, starting as usual, with the fact that he was in need of money. Moreover, he had, as was well known, saved the King's life five or six times over. "Sirc ! Your finances are controlled by a rascally adventurer, and 'tis this very d'O who importunes you to become a Catholic. Now pray what will be the end of that !"

In saying which Agrippa thought : If it is to be, then there is no word that I can say. What a horrible abyss between what is, and is not yet. . . . Now stands the King with bowed head . . . now he speaks.

Henri : "*Totus mundus exercet histrionem.*"

Agrippa : "The Pope's new son will not do him credit, I see that very clearly. But why desert and turn against you those whose courage and loyalty was sure."

Henri : Is it an act of reason—that is the sole question. Rosny has so advised me."

Agrippa : "But he has china blue eyes and a skin that looks painted. He would not care if you went down to Hell."

Henri : "And what of Mornay ? Mornay, the very pattern of Virtue. We have discussed these matters. Both are against the doctrine of purgatory ; and I would deny it against any priest, depend on that. But at the Last Supper I have always held that we drink the Lord's veritable blood."

Agrippa : "Discussion is good and profitable to the soul, so long as the soul desires the truth. Mornay is an honest man and believes you such. You can easily deceive him, and suggest a Council—theologians of both creeds, assembled to investigate the true faith. But if the true faith be not the profitable faith, there is little sense in a Council ?"

Henri : "Not so. More than one Pastor has admitted that the soul can find salvation as well in one creed as the other."

Agrippa : "Though the flesh of such pastors is weak, their spirit is certainly not willing."

Henri : " I am much concerned for my salvation."

Agrippa : " Sire, I believe it. I do now implore you to recognize where your own salvation lies. We are not all of cold and iron intelligence like Rosny. Nor are we all as innocent as your ambassador, Mornay. But one of your best Captains, Turenne, said—why should we not betray the King ? The first act of betrayal is his own."

Again the King bowed his head once more, as Agrippa observed :

Henri : " Betrayal. A mere word."

He thought of his conversation with his sister. Those who live heart to heart betray each other, see what they have done, and know that that betrayal was fated from the beginning. Suddenly the name of Pastor Damours reached his ears.

Agrippa : " . . . Gabriel Damours : at Arques, when you were lost, he struck up the psalm and you were saved. At Ivry, he led the prayers ; and you won the battle. But now a time has come when he thunders against you from the pulpit. There's many a poisonous reptile might hiss at you, and do no harm. But that harsh voice speaks truth, and the guilty man, from whom the faithful turn their eyes away, shall be stricken as with poison."

It was true. The Pastor had written to the King : Listen to the voice of Gabriel Damours, not of a certain Gabrielle !

Henri : " Which is my guiltiest deed ? "

But Agrippa would not answer—whether from modesty, or because he scarce presumed to pronounce final judgment. The whore of Babylon, as Pastor Damours had privately described her, though not, in avoidance of scandal, before his congregation. . . . What disasters would the d'Estrées bring upon the King ? She betrayed him, as he very likely knew. And her father was a thief, disgrace could scarce go further. . . .

Agrippa : " My soul is sorrowful unto death. Great were the days of persecution, and honourable exile. The little province in the South, when the throne was far away,

and when you had no money for a wrestling match, you favoured me with some pious observation that entertained your Court at no expense. The star above our hut in those days was the Princess, your sister."

Henri : "I always suspected there was something between you."

Agrippa : "She set my verse to music, and she sang it. She lent melody to my poor words, and made nosegays of my humble spring flowers."

Henri : "Dear Agrippa !"

Agrippa : "Though my voice fails me, I'll confess I saw her once again. You sent the Princess away privily and promptly, but I was waiting behind the hedge."

Henri : "Conceal nothing—what did she say ?"

Agrippa : "She said that the Salic Law prevailed in the House of Navarre, and bestowed all upon the male heir—except the quality of steadfastness."

The words struck at the King's heart, and his arms dropped at his sides. Then he clasped his hands convulsively, and muttered :

"Pray God for me !"

A MYSTERIOUS HUSBAND

So Agrippa did pray, and so did many in those days, each in his own heart, for they thought him beset by perils ; to the soul especially, but bodily dangers also. Deliverance did indeed come ; or a prospect of deliverance. Monsieur d'Estrées gave his daughter in marriage.

Her adventure at Cœuvres—the King in the bed and the Master of the Horse beneath it, had come to his ears. Bellegarde could not keep silent. Moreover, the jealous admirer avenged his humiliation by paying his addresses to Mademoiselle de Guise, of the House of Lorraine ; but that House still aspired to the throne, and the Duke of Mayenne was no less than ever at war with the King. Hence Feuillermorte disappeared—both from the trenches

before Rouen, and the King's armed peregrinations through France. Old d'Estrées took advantage of their absence to marry Gabrielle to Monsieur de Liancourt—a man of paltry presence, whom he had himself discovered. Nor had he much intelligence or character, but he had begotten four children, of whom two were living. Gabrielle's father took occasion to point out the futility of her love affairs, whereas with her future husband she was certain to become a mother. This was, indeed, Monsieur d'Estrées' particular concern. Moreover, the chosen husband was a wealthy widower of thirty-six, his castle was near at hand, and he came of reasonably good family.

Gabrielle, with death in her heart, was haughtily obdurate, but her resistance from the outset was half-hearted. Her handsome lover seemed to have abandoned her, nor did she expect help from her exalted lord, else she would have summoned him. Indeed it gave her pleasure to think that both the exalted lord and the young admirer would be exceedingly enraged. Monsieur d'Estrées had some trouble with the rather timorous son-in-law, who was terror-stricken at the thought of rivalry with the King over a still recent conquest. Apart from which, Mademoiselle d'Estrées' beauty was more than he could compass. His desire for her was too violent; and this, combined with his shyness, must lead to disillusion. He knew himself for what he was, though indeed his want of self-esteem endowed him with a sense of spiritual superiority. Such was Monsieur de Liancourt: and being such, he took to his bed as the marriage day approached and shammed sickness. The Governor of Noyon had to send a company of soldiers to fetch him to his wedding. It was a trying affair for everyone, save for that worthy old nobleman d'Estrées, who was heartily conscious of his rectitude; which, for him, was an unwonted experience. Madame de Sourdis had tearfully abandoned her ambitions for the family. But she accepted the vicissitudes of fortune.

When, three days after the wedding, she took occasion to make the journey from Chartres and announced herself

at the Castle of Liancourt, what came to Dame Sourdis' ears? Or rather, she herself put it decorously into her niece's mouth, and then neatly extracted a confession. Even then it was none too clear what exactly had happened ; but the fact remained beyond dispute ; Monsieur and Madame de Liancourt slept apart. At this news, the girl's indignant parent galloped the whole way to the castle—but was met with embarrassed faces, and could get neither a Yes nor No. Not until she was alone with him did his daughter admit that the marriage had not really been consummated, and that after her experiences with Monsieur de Liancourt there was little hope of its ever being so. The old gentleman, his bald pate purple with wrath, rushed in upon this undutiful son-in-law. Father of four children,—how dared he offer such an insult? Monsieur de Liancourt excused himself by explaining that he had in the meantime received an unlucky kick from a horse. "Then you should not have married!" snarled the old gentleman.

"I did not ; you compelled me," replied the harassed husband gently. He passed indeed for a shy man, but he could at times assume an air of such vacant self-absorption, that none could tell whether they were dealing with a monster of cunning, an idiot, or something barely of this world. Monsieur d'Estrées' courage suddenly failed him and he fled the castle.

The news that reached the King's ears brought him immediately afterwards to Noyon. He learned not only of his sudden deprivation of his Gabrielle, but also of her mother's frightful end. Issoire lies deep in the Auvergne country ; always regardless of her duty, Madame d'Estrées had not been able to bring herself to leave the Marquis d'Alègre alone, even at the cost of missing her daughter's wedding. Far better had she gone to it. The ageing woman wanted all that was left to her of love, but in regard to money she was also very insistent with her lover. The Governor of Issoire had to grind the faces of the people to satisfy his lady's demands. Both were at last hated with

a hatred that grew near to murder—and it happened. The deed was done on a June night by twelve men, among them being three butchers. They overwhelmed the guards, burst into the sleeping-chamber and butchered the pair. The Marquis had defended himself stoutly, but they were both thrown naked on to the dungheap.

Said the King to the Governor of Noyon : “ That fellow at Issoire came to a dreadful end.” “ And so did his concubine,” observed Monsieur d’Estrées, nodding like someone whose just expectations are fulfilled. The King could not fail to feel himself beset by the supplications of his friends : here—he might have heard them urge—was his opportunity. His mistress’s mother had gone her way before, and reached her end. Surely nothing could prevent the daughter following her mother ; which was precisely what the King now undertook. Gabrielle was now under the protection of a husband ; Henri was merely glad it was not Feuillermorte, who would have given him more trouble. He went to his loved lady, he pledged himself to whatever she might choose, but she must come away with him, and she must live with him ; he could not bear life otherwise. Nor could she—confessed Gabrielle at last, and sobbed upon his chest, and indeed she may actually have wept, though Henri did not see her tears. In any case she wailed out the name of Monsieur de Liancourt, and yet another word, that made his heart stand still. “ Is that true ? ” he asked.

Gabrielle nodded. But she whimpered that she meant to stay with her husband in spite of his shortcoming. “ My poor mother’s death was a dreadful warning to me. I fear Monsieur de Liancourt because I do not understand him. What he says has no meaning, and what he does is more than I can guess. He shuts himself in his room. I have tried to look through the keyhole, but he covers it.”

“ We will soon find out,” said Henri, and marched in bellicose mood to the master of the castle :—but in him he found no adversary. The door stood open, a dim-featured personage bowed ; apparently aloof from all

mundane affairs, except in the matter of his dress, which was embroidered in silver, and his ruff was starched and spotless. And his breeches and doublet fitted with a precision that seemed oddly conspicuous on so paltry a figure. Groping for a hold on some reality, Henri asked this elegant nobleman where he got his stuffs and how much he paid for them. And while Liancourt was answering, he cried :

“Is it true you are no man ?”

“I was one once,” said Monsieur de Liancourt, and looked as though he had been. He said in all formality, with interjected bows and pauses : “I am so at times, Sire. And I decide for myself when it is fitting that I should be so.”

This could be a flat insult : or possibly a measure of deference to his wife’s Royal lover ; but it seemed impossible to pin the fellow down to a statement or a fact. Henri went on, in an almost pleading tone :

“And that kick you spoke of ?”

“I was certainly kicked by a horse. The verdict of the faculty on the kick and its consequences may be variously interpreted.” An observation that left the King open-mouthed.

Henri began to feel disquieted. The man’s face was too vacant, his discretion too elusive, and his assurance too horribly like that of a sleep-walker or a ghost. The creature admitted nothing, wanted nothing ; it merely took shape and appeared, in a truly dim embodiment. Henri could bear it no longer. He crashed his fist upon the table and cried : “The truth !” His fury was indeed aimed not only at the apparition, but even more at Gabrielle, who had probably lied to him, and lay with the fellow every night. He strode up and down the room, collapsed on to a chair and bit his knuckles to the bone.

“By your life !—the truth !”

“Sire, your servant awaits your orders.”

At this point the infuriated Henri recognized that

reality speaks with the voice of authority. He might have thought of this before, but mastered himself in a moment, and pronounced his judgment.

"You will give up Madame de Liancourt to me. You will, in compensation, be appointed Chamberlain. Gabrielle will receive from me as a contribution to your joint property on matrimony, Assy—the castle, woods, fields and pastures."

"I ask for nothing," said the husband. "I obey."

"Gabrielle will continue to bear your name. I may create her Duchess of Assy later on. When she dies, your daughters will inherit . . . Sir!" he roared at Liancourt, who appeared to have gone to sleep standing. The King proceeded:

"In return for which, you will—lest worse befall you—confirm our contention that Mademoiselle d'Estrées married you under compulsion, and you never fulfilled your duties in marriage, whether owing to a kick from a horse, or some privy disease. Do you understand?"

Monsieur de Liancourt understood, as indeed Henri now realized, despite the man's strange torpor, into which, indeed, this largess, these threats of death, these turns of fortune, merely plunged him deeper. Henri marched out and slammed the door.

The occupant of the room sat rigid for a while with his head on his knees. When he at last got up, he bolted the door, and covered up the keyhole. He took out of a chest a large leather-bound book stamped with the arms of the House of Amerval de Liancourt, and began to write. He had for some time past set down the events of his life, and now he set down the last. With great exactness he described the King, what he had said, and his agitation as he paced the room. Intentionally or no, the figure and demeanour of the King were so truly rendered that the writer could see them on his page. Of his lovely spouse he had long since made a speaking portrait. He concluded his narrative with a pronouncement to posterity, headed in bold script: A weighty and veracious statement by

Nicolas d'Amerval, Lord of Liancourt, to be read after his decease and to be preserved for all time.

"I, Nicolas d'Amerval, Lord of Liancourt and other places, in full understanding, and certain of my death, but uncertain of its hour——" he embodied this ultimate message in the solemn form of a testament ; then he added that he had been the victim of injustice, lies and violence. He was not incapable, nor unskilled at the fleshly labour of procreation—this he stated before God. If he were to admit the contrary in a process of divorce, it would be done from obedience to the King, and in fear of his life.

PASTOR LA FAYE

Gabrielle went straight to Henri. He sent his noblemen to bring her to his campaigning Court, and both were happy. The lady was delighted to have escaped from her spectral castle where dreadful things were done behind closed doors. He was delighted to be loved ; her radiant, ravishing body remained calm in self-surrender, which was no surprise to that tempestuous lover. But what a change was here : in former days, a cheerless submission to his desires, and now such utter acquiescence and affection. Henri thought the victory was his, and he who stands upon a peak feels free. It was, to all appearance, a matter for his pleasure whether he stayed with Gabrielle or not. The end was so far away that time scarce came into question ; though a man knows from experience often repeated how long, or rather how short a while, such matters endure.

Not so Henri. This was beyond all experiences, and was to fill his mind and heart as none of the rest had done. There was not space enough for him and all he was to do in the years that remained to her until her death, the greatest death of all before his own. She now gave herself in friendly fashion, but no more ; for she was frank and

would not feign. But what she did not yet feel, he would make her feel ; he would strive and he would win her tenderness, her ardour, her ambition, her devoted loyalty. He always came upon a new discovery ; upon each step of these relations he entered a new world. Indeed, as King and man, he changed, as often as she, through him, became another woman. He would belie and shame himself that she might love him ; abjure his religion and win the kingdom. He would be a conqueror, the shield of the weak, the hope of Europe ;—he would grow great. Soon indeed would come satiety ; all these things were destined and would come to pass in due succession. And in the end the great King's mistress would pronounce the final judgment : she would die, and it would be his lot to become a dreamer and a seer. Meantime the people of his age would look askance at him and all he did. They turned from him as he, in solitude, mounted higher and beyond their ken. All of which was quite known to Henri when he summoned Madame de Liancourt to his camp and Court, and was happy in her company.

Here indeed she pleased everybody and made no enemy of man or woman. The women marked her and admitted there was nothing lowd in her speech or demeanour. She behaved with girlish modesty towards every lady of higher birth or riper age. Not by intrigue and misdealing, but by favour of the King, she held her rank ; and it seemed foolish to grudge her what she so had won. The men of the Court were plain soldiers, men like bluff Crillon, and bold Harambure. "One-eye" his friend and master called him. "To-morrow there's a fight, One-eye. Take care of it, I want no blind commanders !" The older Huguenots of that Court were men of chaste life, and herein unlike the King. The younger took him for a pattern in all matters ; but for both sorts of Protestants, and for his Papist followers, Henri was the hero, to whom only admiration could do justice, and only love could wholly understand.

All of which the lovely d'Estrées came to realize as she

was drawn unresisting into the atmosphere that surrounded the King. Here he assumed a personality far beyond the lover, to which she had to adapt herself, and even the conqueror of Chartres, whose glory had so won her vanity, was but dimly seen. All these men would at any moment have offered up their lives for what he was, and every woman would have sacrificed her son. And each and all of them, men and women too, would have thought it well done, for the King stood for what was best in them, their own completed being, their faith and future. Gabrielle, a calm, collected character, by no means given to extravagance, watched them in silence and with faint amusement—but soon learned where her prospects lay, and how she must behave. And if her heart was not exactly touched, her mind was changed.

She was the quietest person at the Court. There was little that revealed her rank save her aloofness, or as it seemed to many—her indifference. Her admirer, Monsieur d'Armagnac, First Chamberlain to the King, called her the Angel of the North. None, except Henri, understood her magic as did d'Armagnac. Angel of the North, echoed the other Gascons, and gazed ecstatically into her bright baffling eyes. The noblemen of the North, called her so in the spirit of their master, with less irony and much complaisance. At length Agrippa d'Aubigné, crabbed as he was, admitted that the lovely lady d'Estrées practised no unlawful wiles.

Exposed to such a glare, Gabrielle made scarce an error, and certainly not the fatal one. People wondered whether she would mention the name of Bellegarde. Whatever her demeanour, and whether she did so or not, she surely could not but take harm. At last she did mention her former lover, but all such predictions were frustrated. Young Givry, about the same age as the Master of the Horse, and no less handsome, paid elegant and respectful court to her; and through her, to the King. "Monsieur de Givry," said she to him one day, within hearing of several others; "there are words that the King will never forget:

—words that have become famous here at Court ; you told the King he reigned in brave men's hearts, and only cowards would desert him. These were your words, and true indeed they are. Monsieur de Bellogarde is no coward, and the King will soon see him in his place once more."

That was all. No mention of Mademoiselle de Guise, —whereby she made clear that she desired no talk of love affairs ; nothing counted but loyalty to the King. Which was neatly done—and with all the air of candour and simplicity. Scandal had been forestalled—or had it not ? The open claim to stand, blameless, where she stood, seemed to many beyond warrant. The Pastors at the Court were constantly harping on the position ; the King and Madame de Liancourt, both married—a double adultery, in defiance of the world and of religion. The Pastors raised their voices and cried "Jezebel" ; the Prelates were silent. "Jezebel," said the Pastors, as though the wife of the Jewish King Ahab, who perverted him to the worship of her native Baal, could be compared with the Catholic charmer of the King of France. Jezebel had indeed been denounced by the prophet Elias ; and in the end the dogs ate her, excepting only her skull, her feet, and the palms of her hands, as that prophet had duly foretold. None the less, the Pastors were harsh, and therefore unwise. They alarmed the lady, and defeated her good will.

From the priests of her own church, the King's mistress received nothing but kindness and courtesy ; not indeed in hopes of a high marriage, which was still outside all reckoning. It was not yet clear whether the Lady d'Estrées had actually parted from her husband, and priestly diplomats, always prone to a wise passivity, were not likely to touch the King's marriage. Even his change of faith, so much the centre-point of events, and imminent as it sometimes seemed, was never mentioned in the conversations of the Prelates with the King's mistress. Which meant a hint to Gabrielle, and she understood it. Her secret hours with Henri heard no whispered allusion to his conversion. Meantime she dismissed her Protestant retinue—quite

quietly, on the advice of her aunt Sourdis, who marked the passage of events.

Pastor La Faye was a kindly old gentleman, who in old days had dandled Henri on his knees. He it was who spoke to the King. He could do so because he was unhampered by pious zeal and the pedantry of virtue. He admitted that a man could save his soul in either creed. "I must soon appear before God. But were I a Catholic, and called to Him from Mass, instead from Sermon, as is my hope, the Lord in the radiant vault of heaven would not take much account of where I was."

The Pastor sat, while the King paced up and down the room. "Speak on, Pastor. Unlike Gabriel Damours, you brandish no flaming sword."

"Sire! This is an evil choice. Do not offend your comrades in the Faith, by suffering yourself to be torn out of the womb of the Church."

"If I took your advice," replied the King; "there would soon be neither King nor Kingdom."

The old Pastor passed a hand over his face. "Worldly talk," he observed without emphasis, as though it were a matter of very small account. "The King conceives himself threatened by the knife, if he remains in the Faith. But if he abjures it, neither our freedom of conscience nor our lives will ever again be safe."

"'Tis your own safety also that is in your mind," cried Henri, and added in a flush of mortification: "I seek peace for all my subjects, and peace of soul for myself."

"Peace of soul," repeated the Pastor. Then with slow dignity he continued: "So we speak—but so does not speak the world. Sire; after your apostasy you will lose your carefree spirit, you will no longer stand, frank and fearless, before the people, who have loved you; and the Lord too loved you for their sake; you were kindly, because you did no wrong, and cheerful while you were not guilty of betrayal. Afterwards—Sire! Afterwards you shall cease to be our hope."

True or false—probably both: but his words were

weighed with pastoral authority, and the King blanched, which so shocked the old gentleman that he whispered hurriedly : " But you can no otherwise."

He was about to rise, in order to show that the voice was now no longer of the Religion, but of a common man. The King bade him remain seated ; while he himself strode up and down the room. " Go on ! " he said, more to himself than to La Faye. " Have I developed other faults and other virtues ? "

" No," said La Faye : " they are still the same, but they take another meaning as the years pass."

The King : " And am I never again to be happy ? "

The Pastor, wagging his head : " You call yourself happy. But from God there came to you in older days an unremorseful happiness. Soon you will suffer much wrong, and yourself do yet worse wrong—for the sake of your beloved mistress."

" My beloved mistress," repeated Henri, for so in fact he called her. " That she should do me hurt ! "

" Sire, be on the watch, for these things are fated. Go in peace."

What was the meaning of it all ? The King was sickened at the old man's riddles and reproaches ; he went out into the streets of his city of Noyon. There he came upon a tumultuous throng that fell back at the appearance of the King, and out of it appeared no other than Monsieur d'Estrées, Governor of the city, but since his daughter's exaltation, Governor also of the Province. He tore himself out of the clutches of some persons who tried to hold him back.

" My Lord Governor," said Henri sternly ; " Who permits himself to lay hands upon you ? " Guards appeared, and the mob turned to fly. Monsieur d'Estrées' clothes were torn, and strange objects were seen protruding from his pockets : a child's bonnet, a pair of baby's shoes, a watch, a wooden hobby-horse most handsomely varnished.

" I bought the horse," said Monsieur d'Estrées.

"But he did not buy my bonnet," said a shopwoman. "Nor my baby's shoes," added a mechanic. Another asked him in a genial but derisive tone to pay for his toys. The King stared in painful expectation at his Governor, who gibbered unintelligibly, but the deep flush on his red pate betrayed him. His hat lay trampled on the ground, and a prosperous-looking burgher bent suddenly, and picked something out of it; a ring. Not an imitation, a real stone. "From the case that Monsieur d'Estrées bade me show him," said the dealer.

"There is nothing missing," said the King. "I had wagered the Lord Governor that he would not be able to pick up all these things unobserved. I have lost and will pay you."

So saying, he strode away.

THE KING'S SERVANT

Whereupon he left the city promptly and without farewell; Armagnac always kept baggage ready and horses saddled. Henri's purpose was to put a distance between himself and the d'Estrées family, to continue the war, and ride his ways unhampered. But because he so yearned for Gabrielle, and because he could not but be ashamed of her, he risked his life in the trenches before Rouen. The Queen of England was seriously angry with him for so doing, as he learned from Mornay's letters. Several Catholic noblemen warned him in the meantime that they could wait no longer for his conversion. Mayenne gave them a last respite in which to pass over to the majority party. They had the time until the States General met. And that assembly would surely choose none but a Catholic King. In the midst of all these harassments, Henri espied a litter swaying down the Dieppe road. He knew at once who was inside it, and his heart leapt, but not from joy and fierce desire, as when the litter had arrived in the valley of Jehosaphat. Much had passed since then.

He went into his lodging and there awaited her. Gabrielle, silent and alone, entered the room. "Sire, you humiliate me," said she—without pleading or reproach, and in all her unruffled beauty; which tormented him, like the loss of something treasured. In that perfect face he marked traits that made it yet more perfect; this while both were silent, dreading the conversation yet to come. A hint of a double chin, was what Henri saw. A tiny dimple, visible only in a certain light, but how incomparable! "I am ready, Madam, to give you satisfaction," he heard himself say, formally, as to a stranger. But she remained unperturbed.

"How could you conceive so false a view of the affair?" she said, with a shake of her head. "You must protect my father and myself against the people of Noyon, who have ceased to show us due respect."

"That was scarce to be expected," said he curtly—but he waved her towards a chair. She sat, and eyed him all the more severely. "The fault is yours and yours alone. Why did you not promptly punish the insolent mob who brought these charges against Monsieur d'Estrées in your presence?"

"Because they were justified. The things were hanging out of all the slits in my Governor's clothes. I felt as if I had stolen them myself."

"Nonsense! 'Tis a trifling weakness of his, and of late it may have increased. We were used to it; but from mere forgetfulness I forgot to warn you. How often has my aunt de Sourdis gone round to the shopmen and explained what had happened. Besides, the things were usually valueless."

"The ring was not valueless," said he, and eyed with amazement the marvellous hand resting on the chair-arm, and the glittering stone upon it. She was wearing the ring!

"Upon my soul . . .!" said he, though his tone was really one of admiration. "But, Madam, pray explain to me what my Governor wanted with children's toys."

She looked at him, and her expression changed. Her

face, glowing with frank wrath at the thought of insult, softened into a kind of tenderness. Nor indeed was the change assumed.

"Gabrielle!" cried Henri in a hoarse undertone, and his lifted arms dropped. "Why the toys?" he whispered.

"Ready for our child," she said—bowed her head and softly stretched out her opened hands. Humbly and certain of her power, she expected to be kissed and thanked.

At their next encounter, her demands were more considerable: the King was to appoint Monsieur d'Estrées Grand Master of Artillery. He owed her father some reparation, she insisted. Why not this? She did not explain. Henri tried to take the matter lightly. "What does Monsieur d'Estrées understand about the use of gunpowder? It was he who blew up the Grey Tower."

Baron Rosny had blown it up, while the King was besieging Dreux. Rosny, who was a skilled mathematician, was also acquainted with the arts of mining and gunnery. "Monsieur de Rosny's mine," was, before Dreux, a common expression of mockery for the elaborate and pedantic preparations, that went on for six days and nights until the massive walls of the Grey Tower were packed with four hundred pounds of powder. The Court, with all the ladies, gathered to witness the explosion, and made very merry when the sole result was a cloud of smoke, a dull report, and then, for seven and a half minutes—nothing. Rosny's pompous presumption seemed to have met its due penalty—when the tower suddenly split from top to bottom, and, with a frightful crash, collapsed. No one had conceived of such a possibility, least of all the besieged. Many had been standing on the tower, and perished. The few survivors were each given a crown by the King. Rosny would have liked to be Governor, but saw himself again set aside, first, because he was "of the Religion". His enemy, the fat ruffian d'O, could moreover promise the King a portion of the public money, so much as he could spare from his own peculations. So he was, of course, appointed Governor.

But the Grand Mastership of Artillery was still vacant, and Henri meant to give it to his excellent Rosny : and meant it for a reward when the honest fellow returned from the city and fortress of Rouen, whither his King had sent him, with instructions to negotiate the price of surrender.

"Dear Love !" said Henri to Gabrielle d'Estrées. "Beloved mistress," he pleaded. "Grant me this one wish. Choose whatever you please for Monsieur d'Estrées, except only the Grand Mastership."

"No," she answered. "I and my father would be held in contempt by the whole Court if you did not give us this satisfaction."

Her condition perhaps explained her obstinacy. Henri extricated himself for the moment with a vague promise, and at once sent an urgent letter to Rosny enjoining him to make haste. He was not to let the business fail over a matter of money, and whatever happened he must get the gates opened for the King. Gabrielle might forget all about the Grand Mastership if she drove through a triumphal arch into the capital of the Dukedom of Normandy.

At the moment matters so stood that the King's envoy was in sore need of the letter. Indeed, without that letter, the King might easily have lost his city of Rouen, and Rosny his life.

For two whole days Rosny strove manfully over the price with Monsieur de Villars, who commanded in Rouen for Mayenne and the League ; he combated all the Governor's conditions and maintained that the Royal Treasury could not meet them. Meantime delegates from the League and the King of Spain offered untold gold to Villars, upon any condition. Rosny, a man of common sense, very much a Northerner, could not get over the notion that it would have been much better to have blown up the towers and bombarded the city, rather than squander good money. On the other hand, Rosny, later to be Duke of Sully, was extremely set upon his dignity, and inclined on that account to a good deal of display. He would

indeed have succumbed to the ministrations of his Governor, who lodged him in the best tavern in the town, deputed his own retainers to wait on him, sent him his secretary, and received him in his mistress's house. So far, all would have gone well. Meantime Villars, a frank, straightforward man, produced his conditions, which were such as might have been expected in view of the lavish offers of the other side. In the end a lengthy list had been drawn up : Offices and dignities, fortresses, abbeys, a million and twice a hundred thousand for the payment of his debts, a year's revenue in addition, and then more abbeys. It was beyond the compass of any memory, and Monsieur de Villars, as an orderly man, had written everything down, and read it out.

Rosny did not answer at once, for he thought to himself that this was highway robbery. Hence the excellent entertainment and the reception at the mistress's house. And if he refused any item, Villars would sell himself to Spain. And rightly, had it not been for the Royalist cannon. He would show how gunpowder can be smuggled into towers. And in the end, Villars would hang.

Whereupon, with bland blue eyes, and unexpressive countenance, he began his very modest counter-proposals ; but the Governor interrupted him, there was still something he had forgotten. For at least six miles out of Rouen Protestant worship must be prohibited—this to a heretic and the envoy of a heretic King. As a result, the conversation grew more heated, and could lead to nothing more that day. None the less, a preliminary pact was made, but merely because Rosny was so fond of documents and signatures ; and without a document, however trivial, he never retired from any transaction. By courier he informed the King of the monstrous stipulations. But before instructions could arrive, Monsieur de Villars got into his head that the unsuspecting Rosny was his intending murderer. His visitor was impersonating Rosny ; some adventurer had devised the plan of seizing the person of the Governor and extorting ransom. Enough ; when

they met once more, the Governor, with bulging eyes, thought of nothing but hanging and strangling. Rosny had indeed bethought him of the prospect on the first occasion, though his demeanour had not betrayed what was in his mind. And now his sound sense told him that only a violent scene might help him and avert the worst. So he more than promptly countered the Governor's fury, and even called that nobleman an infamous traitor ; whereat Villars was so astounded that he could barely speak.

"I—a traitor? You are beside yourself, Sir."

"'Tis you that are so in speaking of some murder-plot, of which I have never even heard ; your purpose is to break faith, for you have set your name to our pact."

These stern words recalled Monsieur de Villars halfway to himself, so that when his lady entered he said : "Pray do not shout, Madam, I'll shout no more." None the less, his sobered mood, which was mainly due to astonishment, would scarce have lasted. The Monsieur de Rosny's innocence sorely needed tangible proof, or it might yet go ill with him. At that very moment one of his servants brought him the King's letter, with Henri's instructions in the matter of the Governor's monstrous demands. But the lady of Liancourt's demands were the immediate inspiration of that letter : otherwise it might not have arrived so opportunely. Indeed, it may well have been that Rosny had already received it at his lodging. The effect of its delivery here during that high encounter was so notable that on later reflection it could hardly be conceived as an accident. The Governor's mistress promptly expressed her scepticism.

The King accepted all the terms, save only the ban on religious worship, which he did not mention, and Monsieur de Villars likewise passed over the point ; he was, however, to be appointed Grand Admiral. He promptly made amends to the envoy for having mistaken him for his intending murderer. One of the real murderer's agents had fortunately been taken. The Governor sent for him, noosed a rope round his neck with his own hands, and

the retainers hanged him from the window then and there. This done, all that remained was to celebrate so fortunate an issue. "A pox on the League," cried the Governor, in bluff military fashion from the window, where the pendent figure had already attracted the attention of the mob. And he added: "Shout,—Long live the King." This they did, and their voices echoed as far as the quays, where the ships fired off their cannon. Salvoes were fired from the fortress walls, and not a church bell but pealed in celebration. A thanksgiving service in the church of Notre Dame, with Rosny in the front row of seats; reception by the city corporations, and the presentation to the King's envoy of a magnificent service of silver-gilt plate; wherewith Rosny left the city.

When he had lain wounded under a pear tree during the battle of Ivry there also he had won a victory, and indeed made some rich prisoners, for the man was a favourite of fortune. This time, by his own efforts, and with but little aid from fortune, he had secured for the King one of the most notable cities of the realm. And the King's faithful servant was indeed expectant of reward. He appeared, he was embraced, and he made a moving speech. The silver-gilt service belonged to the King; as a matter of principle he accepted presents from no man. Whereupon the King bestowed the plate on him, and three thousand gold crowns into the bargain. So far so good. But when Rosny asked for the Grand Mastership of Artillery, the King again embraced him, and appointed him Governor of the town of Mantes. Rosny lost his self-control, and roundly accused the King of ingratitude. Whereupon the King, with his old habit of jesting upon serious subjects—which had never been to Rosny's taste: "I have long been called ungrateful. But get someone to tell you the latest news from Court."

Rosny had soon discovered the whole story. He shut himself up for an hour, and then went to Madame de Liancourt. She at once divined that he had come about the Grand Mastership, although there was nothing to

reveal as much in his unfailingly dignified demeanour. He was wearing a great deal of jewellery. "Madam, I have asked for the honour of being present at your levée. The King uses my services, it may be that you will one day have need of them."

To which Gabrielle thoughtlessly replied: "I thank you. But when the King is in the field, he receives my letters through Monsieur de Varenne." This was a former cook, who now charged himself with the delivery of love letters. Rosny paled; his face was still high-coloured, but his colour grew a little fainter. Gabrielle was aware that something had miscarried, but omitted to excuse herself at once, and all her efforts afterwards were vain. Had her Aunt de Sourdis been at hand, she would have been better advised, and might still have avoided making this man an enemy for life. Instead of which, the moment she observed her blunder, the unlucky creature hardened her heart, and stared haughtily at Monsieur de Rosny, so that her woman stopped brushing her hair, and a long silence fell.

At last Monsieur de Rosny knelt down on a stool, and replaced one of the lady's slippers, which she had kicked off in her agitation. Gabrielle watched him impatiently, and reflected that even so he could not become Grand Master of Artillery, for Monsieur d'Estrées held that office. The injured man made no sign, he uttered some compliment on the smallness of her foot, and took his leave. Scarce had he left the room than Gabrielle's heart turned over with fear: she had not offered him her congratulations, she had not even remembered his exploit in the matter of Rouen. He was now certainly on his way to the King. "Run!—fetch him back!" she cried to her woman. In vain, Rosny did not come. He asked himself why he hated this lovely woman from his very soul. And he had not yet discovered the true reason; their likeness to each other. Both, fair of hair and from the North, high-coloured, and of cool understanding. Bound to the King, a man of quick laughter and quick tears, by their own advantage; but

slowly something grew up within both of them, that went beyond the experience of their being—a feeling : only the man from the South can teach them in that fashion. Each was soon demanding more ; not merely from a complaisant King, but from a devoted lover. Two jealous people, loving the same person, and eager to do each other hurt—this until the very end.

The King had already betaken himself to Saint Denis, where he was afterwards to abjure his creed. In this matter he was not yet quite resolved ; his mind still wavered, though so much was made manifest that the last decision might well have been taken without so much deliberation. Meantime he held council with clerics, lent his ear to the proceedings of the assembly of the States General in Paris, waited halfheartedly for happenings that might turn his purpose, tried to parley with himself, and even to come to terms with his God. In his uneasy forebodings he yearned more than ever for the company of his beloved. When, on this occasion, he left her behind in another city, he was still innocent of certain experiences that were soon to be his ; therewith indeed it was established that the two were inseparable. The King could conceive of no better emissary to bring his beloved safely to him than his brave Rosny. The devotion of a good servant is not shaken by disillusion. He cannot fail to love Gabrielle, since he sets his salvation upon Henri. So Henri thought.

Rosny at once provided for the journey. Let him not reflect for whom the task was undertaken, nor what was to be the centre-point of that decorous cavalcade. Whether she were his enemy or no, he was disposed for a measured progress through the land, and a ceremonious entry. He rode ahead with his retinue, then came a gap of a hundred paces ; then two mules drawing the litter of the King's mistress. Again an interval. Then a coach with four horses, for her women. Far in the rear twelve baggage animals. It was an admirable and imposing spectacle, bespeaking, like all the Baron's undertakings, his sense of propriety and good order. Unluckily all men are not,

like Rosny, sensible men and aware of their responsibility. At a steep declivity in the road, the driver of the four-horsed coach got down to relieve a need of nature. A skittish mule, despite the baggage on its back, galloped up to the coach horses, with all its bells jingling, and burst into a bray not less formidable than that of Silenus's ass in the valley of Bathos. The four horses bolted; as was inevitable, the heavy coach crashed into the light litter, toppled it to the foot of the slope, and with it what was most precious in the kingdom. "Stop! Stop!" came a volley of shouts, but such was the general consternation that no one raised a hand. Meantime the pole broke, the coach came to a standstill, the horses dashed on alone, and were caught by Monsieur de Rosny's escort ahead.

The lady had escaped so great a peril that the horseman could not reach her quick enough. Terror stifled his speech, he could only make gestures of devotion; and he burst into hoarse cries of joy as soon as he found his voice. The lady was in a fury, and she was also deeply flushed. No one had hitherto seen her otherwise than with a lily-shimmer in her cheeks, that far outshone her roses. This was observed by the horseman with secret satisfaction, for he recalled several of the King's mistresses whom Henri had abandoned because of their proclivity to red blotches on their faces, which he could not endure. It would indeed be twenty years before that fate descended upon one so young; no matter. Rosny felt in good humour, and would simply have continued the journey. Not so the lady; someone must feel her anger, and if it could not be Rosny himself, then he should thrash the coachman with his own hand for his untimely need of nature. The King's servant did so, and a little later he delivered the lovely traveller to his master; now in all the glory of her lilies. "We were green with horror at the accident," he told the impatient lover. "But Madame de Liancourt turned a lovelier colour than ever. Sire, you should have been there to see."

POOR ESTHER

For the time being the pair shared the same lodging in the old abbey, which caused Boucher the preacher to bellow with fury before all Paris. His success indeed was no longer at its height. His hearers were not trampled to death in the thronged church, there were fewer attacks of falling sickness ; which was mainly due to the breakdown of the assembly of the States General. It was at last observed that the various claimants to the throne of France were all of them precarious, but outside the gates of the capital waited the true King ; he needed but to abjure his faith and he could enter the city forthwith. And he proved his wisdom in that he made no further attempt to force an entrance. The gates stood open, the peasants brought their provisions, and the citizens of Paris ventured out. They were now fully fed, and so had plucked up courage, even their long forgotten curiosity returned ; he who listens with a rumbling belly to the lies of Boucher, at last forgets to use his eyes and sense.

They thronged in masses to Saint-Denis, but a few solitary inquisitives made their way to the old abbey ; or at most two friends, who thought to find safety in each other's company. After all there was very good reason to think that this personage was Antichrist himself, for how otherwise could an excommunicated heretic have maintained himself so long against the entire League, the Spanish armies, Philip's gold, and the Papal ban. Two little burghers crept that day into the cloister garden, sought a hiding-place, and there established themselves with the provisions they had brought. Ha !—there was the monster, as punctual as if they had raised the Devil, except that he was not preceded by a cloud of sulphur. He had not even his bodyguard with him, he wore no armour and carried no weapon ; nor was he clad like a King. They were promptly discovered, though he ought not to have

been able to see them through a hedge. There must be something uncanny about the man. "Sire! We have no evil intentions."

"Nor have I."

"We swear that we never believed you are Antichrist."

"I should think you blockheads if you had. There is time for us to become better acquainted. The three of us have to live together for a long while."

He beckoned them out of their lair, and in a trice they lay before him on their knees. He laughed goodhumouredly at their consternation, and suddenly asked gravely about the sufferings of the siege; and when they mentioned a certain flour, which had been got from graveyards, as they now hardly cared to believe, the King closed his eyes and turned pale.

In time to come they talked about this encounter to a large number of curious persons, who were less interested in what the King said than in his expression and demeanour. And whether he were a kindly man or no.

"He is a melancholy man," observed the one who had looked most narrowly into his face. The other protested.

"How can you tell? He was jesting all the time. And yet—to be sure . . ." And the other, who conceived the King as a man of light humour, faltered, and was silent.

"And yet. To be sure. . . ." said the other, who had conceived the King as a gloomy man, in an equally hesitant tone.

"He is tall." Here they were both agreed. "A fine upstanding man, very affable and plain spoken, indeed we were so taken aback that we——"

"Shook hands with him," interposed the second. The first man fell ruefully silent. He had almost revealed that they had prostrated themselves before the King.

In his cloister garden the King received a visit from Pastor La Faye, who was leading a veiled woman by the hand. "We entered unobserved," were the old man's first words. Henri was mystified; he looked from the

Pastor to the woman, but her veil was impenetrable. "Unobserved—and unexpected," he remarked curtly; he was on the way to Gabrielle.

"Sire, and my dear son," said the old man. "God forgets nothing, and when we are least prepared, He brings our deeds before our eyes. And the doer may not disavow them."

Henri understood. He must have known this woman, but where and at what time he could not tell. In vain he looked for some mark on her uncovered hand. No ring; but the fingers were swollen and toughened by toil. He cast about for names in his mind, in much anxiety lest he might be overlooked, and longed to turn round to the windows of the house.

"She is of our creed," said La Faye, as he unveiled her. It was Esther, of La Rochelle; Henri had loved her as well as twenty others, and perhaps better than ten of them—who now could tell? Meantime he was on his way to Gabrielle.

"Madame de Boislambert, I perceive. Madam, the moment is ill chosen, I have business." And he thought: Gabrielle—she will certainly get to hear of all this!

"Look closer, Sire," said the white-haired Pastor, very sternly. "Those of the Religion do not flee from their consciences."

"Who spoke of such things," Henri feigned anger, but as he spoke his anger rose. "I am in no mind to run away, but I have business, and permit no intruders. Not even you, Pastor."

"Sire, look closer," repeated the Pastor. At that moment something within Henri fell away from him, and his impulses of desire and anger faded. Before him, now indeed unveiled, stood an old, sick, and distressful creature—who had once entranced him as a man and inspired his energies. He would not have got so far, nor ever to the open gates of his capital, if all these women had not inspired and entranced him. Esther! Had she come to this! La Rochelle, the fortress by the sea, strong refuge

of the Huguenots, we had marched thence into many a battle as champions of conscience. . . . No need of those lightning looks, Pastor : we are agreed. It is the right moment.

"Madam, what would you?" asked Henri.

And he thought : The moment for the Huguenot Esther to appear in her misery before me, is very surely this one. I am to abjure the Religion, and in requital I am happy with Jezebel, who perverted King Ahab to the god Baal ; and in time to come she will be eaten by the dogs. O beauty, so swiftly punished, our ingratitude blackens thee ; toil and trouble have indeed blackened the face of Esther of La Rochelle.

At this point he would in fact have fled, had she not spoken.

"Sire," she said in a hoarse and quavering voice : "Your child is dead. I get no more payments from your Treasury. I have been cast out by my own people, I am alone, and starving. Have pity!"

She tried to curtsy, and in her weakness nearly fell. It was not Henri but old La Faye who held her up. His eyes flashed, and Henri flung him a gloomy look in response. Then he went. At the end, he nodded to the Pastor in token of a promise that what was needed should be done. And as he made his way along the corridors, his step slackened and he pondered. What had he done, and what could be his recompense? Here was the most shameful instance of his heartlessness. Fleeting tears welled up into his eyes, while he made his way to his next woman. That was his reputation, all knew it, he himself was the last to notice how he stood.

He was amazed at what had befallen him. He had left victims in his path. By all precepts, and his own true consciousness, he should have acted differently, as he knew the troubles of life very well from his own, and had always stood in need of resolution, both in the school of unhappiness and on his passage to the throne. But victims are the guerdon of uprightness. Henri again

remembered Esther, because he had no money with which to make her the allowance he intended ; he would have to deprive his beloved mistress of just that sum. This he conceived to be out of the question, and indeed he was afraid to suggest it, as she would certainly make no sacrifice. He had only to recall the vision of her lovely hand on the arm of the chair, and on it the gleaming jewel, which Monsieur d'Estrées had stolen.

Sunk in perturbation, he entered her room with unwontedly soft tread. From the anteroom he could see through the open door ; there sat the lovely creature at her dressing table : writing. A woman should not be writing, except to her lord. What other letter could be wholly unsuspecting ? Henri now moved noiselessly, and not because he was absorbed in thought. At last he peered over the writer's shoulder, without her noticing him, though they were both facing a small round mirror. Henri read : " Madam, you are in distress."

He recoiled, realizing at once to whom the letter was addressed, but in tense anxiety he followed the circling of the pen, which rasped as it moved, or the sound of his breathing might well have been heard. The pen indited, in a large crude script : " Madam, that is our destiny, when we have put our faith in fine words. We must be prudent, or we shall justly perish. I do not pity you, for your conduct is base, and your appearance here in the garden dishonours my sex. I will give you money to depart. The father of your dead child might easily forget." The pen proceeded, but Henri had read enough. The mirror was clouded by his breath, and she saw no face in it when she suddenly looked up. He promptly retreated backwards from the room, convinced she was aware of his presence, and that what she had written was less for the woman than for him.

He departed for several days, indeed he contemplated breaking with Gabrielle. She was arrogant and burdensome. Through the letter she had conveyed to him that she would never forgive him if he helped the woman.

In truth he did not dare. His business in several cities should serve to make him forget his lady's caprices. He forgot her caprices, but not her ; and in his great longing for Gabrielle, not a thought was left for a poor unfortunate. On the third day he learned that his beloved had received the Duke of Bellegarde.

He fell into a frantic passion, which, at the outset, was very like the fever that in his youth had seized upon him and flung him prostrate after any extraordinary strain—the collapse of a resolute nature, when the void opens : hence that passion. At forty years, he must no longer be taken unawares. With his own hand he must close the open rift in the purpose of his life, as, at that safe age, a man may do. To horse, and woe to the traitors ! He left his escort behind, and moaned his lamentation and his vengeance into the rushing wind. He must be up and doing—he spurned the prostrations of despair ; but punishment must fall upon them both. In pitch darkness he galloped through a wood ; his beast fell, and he found himself sitting on a pile of withered leaves. “ Monsieur de Praslin ! ” he cried, as his noblemen appeared.

Into that proffered ear he uttered orders that he never could have thought to give. Bellegarde should die. “ Cut the fellow down ! You shall answer for it with your head.” Praslin had no love for the Master of the Horse, and would gladly have killed him in a duel ; but he did not believe the King. Henri did not deal in assassination, he had never had a personal enemy put to death, and he would not begin with Feuille morte. “ Sire,” replied Praslin coolly, “ we will wait until daylight.”

“ You think I am out of my senses,” stormed the King. “ I want done what I have ordered you to do. And not only Bellegarde. You are not to kill him alone, if you come upon them both together.”

“ I hear badly in the dark,” said Monsieur de Praslin. “ Sire, you are known everywhere for your kind heart, you are the Prince of a new humanity, and a master of that kind of doubt so favoured by philosophers.”

"I am so no longer," retorted Henri harshly. "Both shall die—the woman most of all, and first." And his voice rose into a shriek, as he added: "I cannot look at it," he veiled his eyes against the visions that came before his mind.

The witness of that dark hour strode on ahead, that he might see no more of it. At last the King swung himself into the saddle. When they reached Saint-Denis, the sky was grey with dawn. Henri dashed up the steps, and demanded admittance, but he had to wait awhile outside, and through that blank portal he could recognize, as though he had been within, all the preparations for a hurried departure. Anguish came upon him, those within could be suffering no more sorely. At last the castle gates were opened, his lady stood before him—restored to him once more; for he suddenly realized that he had given her up for lost. The blood surged into his heart, at the thought that he had her back. She was dressed as though for a journey, a woman fully clad in the greying dawn, opposite a window that was then flung open with a crash; and then came the sound of a leap into the garden.

"Pray explain, Madam."

She looked him in the eyes, and answered coolly:

"Someone who had fallen out of favour with you, and asked my intercession."

"He leapt out of the window. Let him be stopped."

She barred the way: "Sire. Your enemies of the League made proposals to him; but he did not reveal them."

"A pest upon the League! Madam, how comes it that you are dressed and that your bed is in disorder? Intercession—in the grey of dawn and beside a disordered bed!"

She confronted him in her broad hooped gown. "What you fear did not happen," said she with complete composure.

He stamped his foot, this encounter was too temperate for his taste. "Defend yourself! You do not yet know that I am come to expel you from this place."

She looked earnestly into his eyes, with the expression of one who watches for the marks of rising fever. "Sit down," said she—and herself did so, thus exposing the disordered bed. Then she spoke.

"Sire, this is not the first time you have insulted me. You treated Monsieur d'Estrées with contempt. And you degraded me when you received that woman in the garden. You went without bidding me farewell, and I omitted the folly of answering the letter of a more loyal friend. He appeared before dawn, which you should consider a mark of delicacy. Would you have preferred that we should be observed by the awakened house?"

With an effort he listened to the end, clutching the arms of the chair lest he might leap out of it. Then, he drew it towards her, and spoke, word by word, into her face :

"He was to fetch you away ; that is why you are so dressed. You meant to go ; you meant to marry the man."

"With your permission," she replied—her face uplifted, but not moving it from his.

"That I will never give," he murmured. "The mother of my child," he added abruptly and aloud. At the word, she blinked her eyelids twice, but made no other sign ; a silence fell. Both knee to knee, and almost chin to chin ; and a breathless pause. A shiver shook him, then his mouth and throat suddenly felt parched, he could not swallow ; he went to the table and drank a glass of water. Whereupon he left the room without another glance at her.

Madame de Liancourt waited no longer, she had her baggage packed. She was not sure whether she had lost the game. Her best course seemed to be a visit to her aunt de Sourdis. Dame Sourdis had said : Whatever may happen, never plead, and never on any account express gratitude. Gabrielle could hear the old lady's voice from afar, as she gave vague orders to the maids about her baggage. She had indeed no depth of mind, and it was from want of forethought that she committed her momentous blunders, as with Monsieur de Rosny. But this time it

was enough that she recalled the principle impressed upon her—never to plead, and never to express gratitude, but always merely to wait until the enemy gave an opening. And she thought to herself: He had no one. No one in the world, for he was about to make a leap, that he was pleased to call the death leap. He was more certain to lose his party than to win the kingdom. When they lay together at night, she said but little; he talked to her. It pleased her to play the innocent.

Here she bade her maids cease packing. Left alone, she put on her lightest, most transparent dress; of a sudden she was certain that he would come back. His women had mostly betrayed him, there were too many of such tales. He had never before been jealous, though he was so for the first time now. ‘That must be painful for him,’ she said in an undertone, and, her hands lying limply in her lap, she was aware of a fleeting impulse of affection for him who, for her sake, was to become another man, and would with her help enrich his capacity for suffering. Indeed she came near to remorse. She had blinked her eyelids when he spoke of his child.

He entered, lifted both her hands and said: “It shall be forgotten.”

“You are troubled, Sire,” she answered gently—but did not fail to observe that he had endured an hour of horror. His face looked pale and weary. Weathered by a hundred campaigns and strained by years of fighting, a face does not grow weary nor pale; one must look beneath the skin. And that she did, and moved she was at last.

“Sire! You have the most irresistible way of paying court to me.” So saying, she opened her arms, no longer merely tolerant and kindly; passionate at last.

When, for both of them, the moment of surrender had passed, nothing was thereby altered—he, as before, restless and violent, she unruffled and unsure. “Angel of the North!” he cried in a voice of desperation; “Swear to me that nothing shall equal your fidelity, save only mine.” But he did not pause. “But how can you swear this to me now,

twice have you broken faith already. You look on calmly at my terrible suspicion, while you forgive another man his open treacheries. Feuilmorte is afraid of the League, and he has not only paid court to Mademoiselle de Guise, he is involved with her mother too. You are nothing to him, and he is not a man of mine."

The jealous man grew frantic in his eagerness to humiliate his adversary, to subjugate that inviolate heart. "And you could write to him! After all your promises! You shall never again say—I shall do. Only—I do. Resolve, Madam, to have but one servant."

He groaned aloud, clapped both hands to his forehead, and dashed from the room. He felt that he could fall no lower.

In the old garden Pastor La Faye was awaiting him. When Henri saw him, the bond between his misery and his guilt so struck at his heart, that he stopped and stood motionless. The Pastor was ten paces away, under a clump of trees. "*Poor Esther is dead,*" said he.

Henri bowed his head on his chest, and remained so long speechless that the old man in the shadow of the trees could bear the silence no longer. He said: "I may well have been your guiltiest deed, Sire. Poor Esther has reached the throne of eternal love."

Henry looked up, and above the treetops he espied the heights. "In the valley of Jehosaphat I for the last time had the choice," and he hurried away.

La Faye remained, shocked as well as sad. This was blasphemy. The King must be deranged. He was preparing to abjure the Religion, but dared to compare himself with the Saviour, when He was tempted and in vain.

It was not until later that Pastor La Faye discovered that the Valley of Jehosaphat had been the name given to the Royal camp before Chartres, and when one day, the King, plastered with mire, clambered out of the trenches, whom did he see approaching in a litter? The being created by the Almighty for His inscrutable purposes with the King.

An old Protestant would not have believed that Gabrielle d'Estrées had never urged her lover to change his creed. It was only then that Henri himself knew the truth, in so far as it is to be divined simply in speech and silence. But afterwards he admitted when a friend questioned him about his conversion : " Sire, who really converted you ? "

And the King answered : " My beloved mistress, the charming Gabrielle."

BOOK THREE

THE DEATH LEAP

THE MYSTERY OF INJUSTICE

PHILIP MORNAY had in truth but one English friend left. And as Henri's envoy made his way yet once more across the Channel, on the last and most burdensome of all his missions, the company of those he had known came back into his mind. They were many, in various ranks of life, and some had so long passed out of his ken that he might well have forgotten them. But his first and longest sojourn had been his exile, when he had learned much of what he knew. The people who had taught him survived in his recollection, and many of them there alone. The fugitive Protestant's property had been confiscated, and if he had been caught in his own country he would have ended his life in prison, or on the scaffold. A young man, whose poverty did but edge his mind, he frequented every sort of society in London, and, haunted still by apocalyptic visions of Saint Bartholomew's night, he made the most of them and told his tale wherever he might be. The guests at cheap tavern ordinaries listened with blank faces. Whether they took him seriously was more than he could say. In reply to his savage imprecations on the murderers then dominating his country, the horrors which the exile conjured up, the prophecies of retribution in the next world and in this,—they merely said : " Do you truly think so ? "

One day, in that far-off epoch, he took his clothes to a tailor to be mended ; while the tailor sewed, Mornay talked, and the man's wife brought in some other occupants of the house to listen. It was some time before the exile realized, in the fury of his feelings, that clad in little but his shirt—for the suit he had taken off was the only one he had—he must look an odd sight, and was now exposing

his soul as well as his person. He fell silent, nor did his audience utter a word until the tailor gave him back his clothes. Then one of the women neighbours brought him a mug of beer, and said : " I am sure it all happened thus, but so very far away. And I never heard of a woman drinking blood before."

This had taught young Mornay never again to express his feelings. Deeds so horrible, that cried aloud to God, should surely have roused the world : a hundred miles away, in another Christian realm, they were no more than a tale that is told, which might indeed have been a better one. Thenceforward the exile clung to the knowledge that loses no truth by the passage of frontiers, and speaks a common speech. Thereby he would find acceptance. So he pestered all the booksellers of London to publish his theological writings, but in vain. Some were afraid of certain views that were interdicted even in that Protestant land. Others insisted that the author must write in English, not in Latin. But he had some profitable encounters with learned and distinguished persons in the bookshops. Some took a liking to and invited the foreign exile to their houses for the enjoyment of his disputations, and some engaged him to teach French to their children. One of these was Lord Burghley.

He had sons, the eldest of whom was of the same age as Mornay and a youth of ready mind, by no means indifferent to the Frenchman's vicissitudes. Here, thought the Englishman, were two young men, both of the same faith, both with minds perturbed and eager to serve a higher humanity ; both, too, of like origin, save for the unequal value of their rank, for nobility stood for more in England—none the less there was little to choose between them, and fate, with a trifle of good will, might well have changed their places. All this the sagacious youth observed, but expressed nothing of his wonderment at his own good fortune. There he sat in safety, while Mornay had had to flee his country. Mornay had been robbed, menaced, and affronted to his very soul. A golden future lay before young Burghley,

merely because he was such a one as Mornay, but an Englishman. . . . God save the Queen !

The great man's son paid homage to his star, but he felt too deeply not to understand that he too must bear some guilt for all these squandered foreign lives. It was no concern of common folk. But a man of knowledge is under bond to stand forth for Christendom one and indivisible, lest it be brought to ruin by the practising of evil, which we do nothing to prevent. And he began to think of Christendom as a structure, rising by ever-narrowing stages, of which the topmost vanished from the picture. So vivid was the vision, that, though no draughtsman, he promptly sketched out the design. It stood upon pillars, detached but closely clustered, as it were England, France, and the other lands and kingdoms. Suddenly, upon that serene structure dashes a fiend with brandished torch. Besotted in his fury, he fires the first of the pillars ; the second too is soon ablaze, then others also. A Christian looks on, his hands clasped across his anguished breast, but he does nothing to avert disaster : which, by some strange miracle, does not come to pass. The building still tops the wrecked pillars as though hovering upon air ; and the upper parts of it are still unseen. When the artist showed it to the exile, the latter, after observing it awhile, said :

“ Evil is beyond the compass of the mind. Your drawing signifies nothing less than the mystery of evil.”

These words perplexed the artist, who bent over the paper as though he were looking at it for the first time. But Mornay,—long and weary is the exile's journey and much he learns from it—felt in that moment proud of the wrong that he had suffered, for it was a part of the mystery. And so he always deemed it in his own mind, although in life he championed the right, in which there is no matter for marvel.

Young he was, and in those days he was more disposed for tennis or rowing with his English friend, than for learned conversations. The pair lent each other books, and still

oftener they shared the same companions of both sexes, each and all in brotherly innocence. O lovely Thames, stream and air and banks steeped in lush, light colours: summer days that turned even a haunted exile into a care-free child. How soon that Paradise perished—that light-foot company with their singing and their kisses and their nosegays, a snatched caress in a green glade, and the sound of muted viols behind a hill : alas !—how soon it perished ! The exile returned, chose the Prince he meant to serve, and travelled upon his affairs to the Courts of Europe, but most frequently to England ; in all of which there were certainly no youthful delights. Englishmen were now his diplomatic adversaries, nor were they agreeable or easy to handle. Yet every time he saw the chalk cliffs and set foot upon that shore, he heaved a sigh as though he were coming among friends. He had indeed but one friend there, to whom above all others he owed his friendship for that land. A country is beloved for an attitude of mind, a faith, an ancient fame, of which it is far less conscious than he who visits it at whiles, and lands beneath its cliffs.

Lord Burghley had inherited his father's title, and was now High Treasurer of the kingdom. The envoy went to him even before he waited on the King's Ambassador. He came to a house that stood apart against a sky of flying cloud, above a shore scattered with fishermen's huts. Mornay found his friend in a modest apartment, where the Minister was directing the labours of a number of clerks ; it was indeed from here that the finances of the country were conducted. At the appearance of the visitor the clerks looked up curiously ; he stood facing them until they dropped their eyes again, their curiosity unsatisfied. After a due pause the noble lord observed : " I trust you had a good journey," and led him into his own cabinet. Not until then did they shake each other by the hand, and look long into each other's faces. By way of pretext they both said : " You are quite unchanged," but they had done so because it heartened each of them to look into the other's eyes.

"The position is difficult," Burghley began, as they sat down on the hard black chairs. Mornay realized that Burghley meant to help him through the interview that was to come. He swallowed with an effort. "But that, for you, is no new thing," Burghley continued.

"I have not lost my courage," Mornay managed to reply.

"Last time you had none too easy a task here, but you brought your business to a good issue in the end."

"Because your Queen is just and firm," proceeded Mornay. He repeated: "Just"; and then added: "Firm." Of whom was he thinking, who was neither? He hurriedly suppressed his unuttered thoughts, and said: "My King is still the resolute master I have served for so many years. It is his position that is shaken, not he. Your Queen is displeased because he would not starve out his capital. Nay worse; a rumour has reached Her Britannic Majesty that my King is proposing to abjure the true religion."

As Burghley fell grimly silent, Mornay asked him in a low tone: "Do you believe it?" Then, raising his voice: "As God is my witness, I am certain it is not true."

"Then you are the right man to convince the Queen," was the reply.

"Will you stand by me, Burghley, as you did before?"

"Friend," said the High Treasurer, trying to speak in the old familiar fashion: "it was a mighty simple matter last time—not to be measured with what faces you now. The Queen had a man in her mind. We were all young."

"Young? It is only two years since."

The Minister paused, and pondered. In very truth, two years ago the Queen still loved, still suffered. But he said nothing, and Mornay went on: "Two years make no great matter. A passionate nature like that of your great Queen remains so always, whether the impulse be a man, or one incomparably nobler: religion. I have already sweated blood and water over the Earl of Essex——"

Again the Minister was intent upon his own thoughts and let the envoy speak on. Passion, he thought, is easier approached than wisdom. What could he do when the Queen could neither rage nor suffer.

"I have already sweated blood and water over Essex," said Mornay. "And what will come of this affair?"

Something that will amaze you, my old friend—the words were on Burghley's lips. But he merely answered: "This time you will talk more and with greater vehemence than Her Majesty. You have nothing to fear from the Queen."

"Truly, Burghley? When Essex remained with the troops in France in the face of all the Queen's appeals and orders, preferring to brave her disfavour rather than miss the arrival of the Duke of Parma—the threats and imprecations that burst upon my head! My King had not received Essex personally, nor with proper ceremony. My King had rashly exposed his own life, but most unforgivable of all, he had let the English troops, and Essex—Essex!—fight in the front line! Not another English soldier should be sent against the Duke of Parma until Essex was back at Court. Her Majesty was sick to death of French affairs. After a last outburst of fury, she did not sleep all night, fell ill, and so the matter ended."

"Two years ago," repeated Burghley, with lowered eyes. Then he looked up, and said: "Remember, Mornay, you are speaking of the past. You got the regiments in the end, though not until you had gone, and Essex had come back. We two, Mornay, were able to prevail in some measure on the Queen, because we—not of set purpose, but because it is in the hearts of men like us to do so—we took no heed of that which makes all women alike. You, Mornay, are well favoured by the Queen."

"Still? I had heard that something was reported against me in my absence."

"A foolish trifle," said Burghley; and he laughed as he rose, well pleased that this oppressive colloquy was ending on a lighter issue. "When you were besieging

Paris, someone at table with you derided the Queen's faulty French. She is too generous to bear malice, and you will be received as is your due. You are the trusted friend of England and its ruler."

All in all, this had been an encouraging encounter. It was surely a good omen that as early as the third day the Queen summoned the special envoy to her presence. She sent a state coach to the Ambassador's house, and Monsieur de Beauvoir la Nolle accompanied Mornay, escorted by an English guard of honour. At the moment when the two gentlemen entered the presence chamber the Queen appeared through a door at the further end. Her numerous retinue fell back against the wall on either side. But for the array of cavaliers and ladies, Mornay would have been unaware that Her Britannic Majesty was there in person, though indeed the length of the great chamber lay between them. She seemed to him shorter than he remembered her before. That long-limbed form seemed less rigid, and she no longer wore her hair in a high headdress, as had been her habit. Indeed Elizabeth was actually wearing a coif.

So much Mornay observed as he entered: then, traversing the room with eyes obsequiously downcast, three paces away from her, he stopped, looked up, and saw her as she was. The Queen was no longer painted, except for some blue and black patches round the eyes, designed to soften their harsh set look, like a falcon's steely, lidless glare. All her features had sharpened since last time, and they bore signs of age. Or rather, age had been allowed to lay its touch upon her—indeed this weakening of the great lady's will was what struck Mornay, who had all his life conceived of Elizabeth of England as the fleshly embodiment of power established and unassailable. But for her long rule and her indomitable youth, freedom of conscience in Europe would have had short shrift: and whence would have come the aid and comfort that had heartened the King of Navarre, afterwards of France, in his darkest hours? Mornay suddenly marked a wisp

of grey hair straying from beneath her coil. He paled, and it was with an effort that he set himself to address the Queen.

The speech was no more than a ceremonial display, as was everything that passed that day. The Queen listened standing to the solemn homage of the King of France, presented by his special envoy, first in Latin and then in English. When the time came for her to reply, she mounted four stairs to her raised seat, but not with the light step of a year or two ago. She moved slowly—perhaps deliberately so. It was then that Mornay began to be sceptical. The change was too visible, and too abrupt; moreover, her purposely dragging gait moved one of the cavaliers to offer her his hand: it was the Earl of Essex. Elizabeth did not even glance at him, she barely touched his hand, but suddenly her regal airs returned. Enthroned, her close-fitting stomacher erect and rigid, sat the Queen, clad in the dark grey silk that she had worn for many years. Her favourite, who looked no more than six and twenty summers, though his smooth face belied his age, stood in a nonchalant, boyish attitude, with a look of disarray that did not hide his elegance—and one leg lightly poised. Thus he had helped the old lady to her chair, and thus he stood now she was seated. It should be known—foreigners were present to see and report the matter—that he was more of a personage at Court than the Queen admitted. He was master; against his charms the Queen had no other counsel than that of quickly growing old. All this was uttered in his mere aspect. His devotion was a mask, and even his undeniable grace was a counterfeit of what it seemed. Charming now, he would soon degenerate unless his patroness took care. That slim leg would be set firmly on the ground: and the Great Queen would do well to watch a heady youth who might cease to be her plaything, and from mere wantonness become her terror and her bane.

Mornay detested the favourite, and was delighted at what then occurred. The Admiral, the Marshal of the

Court, and all the officers mainly concerned in the ceremony, stood round the royal chair in a half circle, while Essex behaved as though they were mainly a background for himself, and he were exhibiting the Queen. He beckoned to his uncle Leighton, who in his turn whispered to a second gentleman, and a third produced a written scroll—not at all readily, as could be observed : they were, indeed, affronted. But Essex coolly snapped his fingers to hurry them, took the document, which was the Queen's ceremonial reply, and he it was that gave it her. He alone of that assemblage seemed to possess authority when, with a kind of careless deference, he was seen to hand the unrolled parchment to the monarch. In an instant, a curt gesture of the Queen, who had begun to speak, had flung it to the floor. The favourite, now ousted from the picture, made a grimace that slowly darkened into wrath. Then he noiselessly slipped out of observation behind his uncle.

Her Majesty's voice was clear and imperious as ever, it carried beyond the pillars and tapestries, and the ladies stood open-mouthed ; for such force may be absorbed with the intake of the breath. Elizabeth described the King of France as the sole Prince of Christendom who stood sword in hand against Spain—whereat she rose and plainly awaited the applauding murmurs of her Court. Thereupon with a few gracious words she dismissed the two envoys. As they bowed they noticed the roll of written parchment lying on the floor untouched. They withdrew, keeping their eyes fixed upon the Queen during their departure, and Mornay, who was on the watch, observed that Elizabeth stepped sideways from the dais, and so trod upon the parchment.

Only five days passed before the Queen sent a privy summons to Mornay. He came on foot and found Elizabeth alone, by a book-strewn table. The diplomat took advantage of this fact, he extolled the good fortune of a monarchy that was not a camp, and set no double sentries at its gates ; but stood safely on its own just institutions. Elizabeth, who had greeted him with courtesy, drooped

her head so deeply that after his first few words she could gaze up at him and ask him with a mute look what in truth he meant. She was well guarded, whether he met her soldiers in the corridors or not: that of course he knew. His purpose merely was to open the matter of his visit, and announce that his master, the King of France, was heralding an age of domestic peace, such as England owed to her great Queen. Hence he hoped that no offence would be seen if his master's dealings seemed strange and hesitant at times. This was, by his intention, to lead up to the rumours of a change of faith. The Queen ignored it all.

"I have often had to complain of the King of France," she said in the ringing, cadenced tones that she used with such effect. Then to his astonishment she added: "He should have used the force I sent him to take Rouen: that was why I sent it."

Mornay remembered that only two years ago she had behaved like a damned and demented soul, because her Essex could not be extricated from Rouen. Here sat a woman who had made her renunciation. She was wearing no coif, her white hair was unconcealed, and beneath it still a glimpse of red tresses, now covered with a web of white, like the glitter of hidden gold.

"He could have starved Paris out," she went on, but less emphatically than she had spoken about Rouen. Mornay was ready with explanations; a King must spare the lives of his fellow-countrymen, even when in revolt. He and they must live a common life together under the providence of God.

She eyed him once more—how much of this was hypocrisy? Then she remarked simply: "I commend your master."

The envoy bowed acknowledgment. And the change of faith? he thought. Speaking more familiarly than before, she explained what it was that she commended.

"Your master is a King. He prefers to buy his cities rather than bombard them into ruins. Wherefore he employs hucksters like this fellow Rosny."

"A faithful servant," objected Mornay to the more specific charge. Elizabeth nodded.

"He is indeed one of the earlier friends. A King makes new ones. He lets the old ones drop"—with a wave of the hand—"when they have served their purpose."

Gladly would Mornay have asked whether the new ones might also be rogues and traitors. But he did not speak.

"He may survive without the change of faith." At last! The envoy's heart began to throb. Elizabeth kept her lips open, she was listening into the distance. "There will be much blood shed," she said in an undertone, with a shrug of her shoulders. "The age of peace is not yet at hand. After each of his battles the Powers will consider whether he should then be recognized. *Vederemo*, said the Pope. But the allies of the King of France would at last have had enough and lose hope as well as patience." A sudden sharp glance into the envoy's eyes.

He realized that this was his moment, but he did not know how to begin. He had expected a torrent of reproaches; but Elizabeth seemed unperturbed by the fatal rumour; she spoke as though it were true, and behaved as though she wished it so. Mornay did not believe her. The great Protestant could neither give up hope nor patience because her ally held fast to the Religion. She was not made so, her suspicion fell on others. Could she be hiding her known passion for the true faith under a mask of age and renunciation? this would explain the turn of their conversation. The moment pressed: he must not blunder. He must not admit that the King might renounce his faith. She was testing him, to make him speak with candour. That he would do, and could do without peril. His King would not recant.

When Mornay had thus stiffened his courage, all in the drawing of a breath, his deep-set craft came back to him, and all his inner strength. So he began quietly to recount the achievements of the new faith, and of human liberation; they were indeed identical, and for that very reason Protestantism was laying hold upon the world.

Venice, the oldest Republic, had offered her commendations to the King of France, she was watching him and what he did, being in a mind to separate from Rome. The Pope himself had actually observed: "We shall see," because he could no longer maintain the ban of the Church upon a sovereign backed by half Europe. "He is the only Prince who stands sword in hand against Spain." Mornay carefully repeated Elizabeth's own words. "And Spain may yet raise armies in her hour of doom, her dissolution may lie heavy on the world; but what can she avail in the end? My King is not only the one hero and Prince who wields the sword; here are the nations of Europe, and a movement for human freedom. Setbacks will but speed it onwards, defeats will bring it increase. My King fights and stands on firm ground: that is the will of God in history."

The Queen listened and was silent. There was an intent, almost girlish expression on her face; she drooped her head over the table and sat with her chin on her level hand. The thought flashed through Mornay's mind: Had she merely caught the art behind the self-betrayal of that speech? He could not linger on the reflection. He must drive home what he had said and banish the Queen's doubts—but how?—for all the true facts had been spoken. He had set them forth as they should stand, if so be that his master held to the faith. Impossible!—as Mornay recognized; he could go no further, for Henri would not hold to it. He would recant. This unassailable conviction now first came to the unlucky Mornay on the matter; and it came to him by virtue of his own words, under the Queen of England's chilly eyes.

He took his hands from his chair, held them uplifted for a moment and turned his eyes away. Suddenly his resolve was taken, he stood up, laid his right hand against his chest, and said in quiet tones: "I confess it. My King will abjure the Religion. He dares to take the death leap, as he calls it."

And Elizabeth's silence signified: We understand

each other. But why not sooner? And Mornay answered her :

"Because it is a fact, and so appears ; but it is none the less untrue. Twenty years of war for conscience' sake are not less real and ineffaceable. He cannot with his heart recant."

And the movement of her shoulders said : Without it, then. Mornay, speaking more intently :

"Five times he has changed his creed. Three times from black necessity ; this will be the fourth time for that reason, nor will it be the last. That I can testify and that I know. To gain the power that should be his, my King must needs fight for our freedom, or he would have achieved nothing. I trust Your Majesty may think of this day, and of a humble servant who has offered you good counsel. I beg you not to take my master's recantation in good earnest, and not to withdraw from him your aid and your regard." Mornay drew a deep breath to nerve himself for what still needed to be said ; though it had not entered his mind until that instant.

"The King of France means to establish a national Church ; both creeds united, and the Pope banished from our faith." Then, having grasped and compassed the whole matter, he ended gravely with the old, old words :

"Imminet schisma in Gallia."

Elizabeth eyed him, nodded approval, and her sole answer was that zeal had bestowed on him what nature had denied : the gift of eloquence.

"Si natura negat, facit indignatio versum," said she. What she meant was that she did not believe a word, and Mornay must be demented if he thought she would. But she spoke kindly ; and what she then said was meant to recall him to his senses.

"I commend your words, my friend, touching the fight for freedom. How else could he have achieved his greatness? And, after his recantation he will still fight and beat the Catholic Majesty of Spain. I am sure of it, and I will stand his ally. But regarding a separate

Church——” And her voice suddenly hardened : “ Monsieur Duplessis, where have you spent the last ten years ? ”

He saw that he had shot his bolt and lost ; he could only add, as a good Christian : “ God’s glory is of no less account than the King’s service.”

At this, Elizabeth’s face suddenly grew lined and old. “ Such opinions will soon drive you into exile again,” she said in a quavering, almost tearful voice : “ You are gifted with the power to imagine and persuade. You did your utmost with me, but I am an old Queen and know the world. Your master will cherish you Protestants, for I am told he is a kindly man ; but withstand him in good earnest, and he’ll have your heads. I dealt so with my Catholics, though I did not cherish them. The will of God fulfils itself in varying ways. He’ll have your heads,” repeated the old lady in a sorrowful tone : and indeed, had she not spoken so, that terrible presence, and that ringing voice, would have been beyond all bearing. Even now, Mornay was tempted to dash out of the room.

Then she added, as though at a sudden thought for Mornay : “ But you shall come to no harm ; I’ll speak a word for you in season. You have served me, as you have served your King : and I never forget. But I shall not welcome you again as his envoy.”

She was speaking more naturally, and her face had softened. “ He made a Protestant victory impossible, when he took his new mistress.” She waved aside Mornay’s protest. “ A Queen knows these things. Who will now conspire against his Catholic victory ? Mistresses are apt at conspiracy.” She sat, stiff and rigid, her hands gripping the knobbed chair-arms, and in her eyes the steel-blue, lidless falcon-glare. Then she leapt to her feet, stepped quickly forward, flung back her head, and said in voice that rose nearly to a shriek :

“ Did you see him ? ”

Mornay stiffened, as at the sight of something monstrous. “ I know him,” she cried. “ I have begun to

know him now. When we dragged him out of Rouen, we should have left him there. Fool that I was ! ”

She strode up to Mornay and bent over him : “ You understood the meaning of that pantomime—with him to the fore, making a display of me, his Queen ! Then learn the look of danger. Your King speaks of a death leap. I will not take that leap.” The shriek turned to a wail. “ The King will have to destroy what he loves most. Tell him so. Be sure you warn him, he must be beforehand with traitors. He must read the end of them in their own eyes before they know it themselves.”

The woman was now weeping undisguisedly, she flung herself full length across some silken cushions on a coffer ; a monstrous, stricken thing in agony. Mornay felt that he ought not to look at her, but he made no motion. It was the Queen. He trembled, perhaps in horror, and perhaps in awe. Beneath a mask of age and renunciation she had indeed concealed her passions, whatever they might be. Not indeed a passion for the faith, but for all that concerned her power and her kingdom—so the pious Mornay told himself, refusing to contemplate the worst of all. None the less, before his inner vision stood a black scaffold, and he could see who mounted it.

He waited, with averted face. When at last he turned his head, Elizabeth was sitting at her table of books ; she had opened one of them, and her lips were moving. Then she noticed him, and said :

“ Your thoughts were straying, master envoy. Meantime I was reading Latin, not French, for my French is faulty, as you know. You have surely had a vision of dark times, and they may well be near at hand. An exile once more in the years when the soul needs peace. But I like you well and I offer you refuge.”

This was Mornay's dismissal, and he could return to his Thames-side inn. It was not in his mind to visit anyone, not the Ambassador, and still less Lord Burghley. His room aped the splendour of a castle, but it was a tawdry, empty splendour, in which the unhappy man saw a pattern

of himself. Henceforward he was a whited sepulchre. If only he had had the courage of his new condition. He had indeed entered the Queen's presence like a man among living men ; it was she who had made him understand that he was cast out among the dead. He remembered that he had upon occasion trafficked in politics by pretending that his master would recant ; but conceived himself as merely using a ruse. Now it had turned to truth, and he himself was the gull. He stood with bowed shoulders at the window : beneath him the glittering river rippled past. Once there had been summer days—the Thames, stream and air and banks steeped in lush light colours, days that turned even a haunted exile into a carefree child. . . . Summer days . . .

Mornay was not the man to linger over such sentiments, nor did he yield to despair. For the following week he kept his room, on the pretext that he was ill, but indited a learned and most persuasive document upon the necessity of a Gallican State Church. If he could have assembled the Council of Pastors and Prelates, and the King, in his room at that very hour, he was sure that he could have prevailed. But the work was done, the room desolate and empty ; so Mornay kindled a fire and burnt the document. Then he waited on the Ambassador, Beauvoir, gave him a plain account of his failure with the Queen, and touched on what had also happened at the audience ; she would declare herself if she were pressed. Beauvoir must arrange yet one more audience : Mornay would now be strong enough, she would protest to the King against his recantation. She would restrain him from an ill-judged act—Mornay laid stress on this, and Beauvoir agreed, although he was averse to any interference from the Queen of England, and regarded Monsieur de Mornay as a theologian rather than a practical statesman, despite his worldly arguments. However, Elizabeth replied that she was not at leisure, she hoped that she would soon see Monsieur Duplessis-Mornay again, and her Admiral would place a Royal ship at his disposal for his journey

home. Before the vessel was ready to weigh anchor, Mornay went to take leave of his one English friend. This time the High Treasurer admitted him by a small privy door, not leading into the clerks' room : Mornay stepped through it and made his way into the black panelled cabinet. On the table, between two glasses, stood a bottle of *claret*, the King of France's daily wine. "We drink to his happiness and prosperity," said Burghley, and they did so standing.

They sat a while in silence. "Now you know how matters stand," said the noble lord, making a wry face, as though the wine had been sour. "Your King has, as he has always had, an ally against Spain."

Against the Religion too, they both thought. And against the right. Such is the world, they thought. No kingdom remains pure from error and repentance. Mornay spoke very slowly, savouring his words. "The King ventures on his death leap with great self-denial, more than we could ever show. And where shall I find words in which to praise your great Queen's wisdom? Her Majesty is marvellously eloquent upon the subject of good and evil."

"Marvellously so, indeed," repeated Burghley. His eyes began to twinkle, and he raised his forefinger as though past echoes of such eloquence came back into his mind. "I see," said he, in his usual simple tone. "You failed. Pardon me, my good friend, that I did not foretell to you the issue. I know how wise the Queen is, and I know too that it is harder dealing with wisdom than with passions, and she has conquered hers."

Mornay did not reply—nor did he mention Elizabeth's self-betrayal, indeed he dismissed it from his mind. After a pause, he said :

"This shall make no odds between the King and myself. I know my duty, and will do it the more heartily after he recants, for he will then be in worse peril than before."

Burghley laid a hand on his arm : "You too will have to recant"

"No!" shouted Mornay—recovered himself at once, and continued in an undertone; whether he spoke in humility or defiance, Burghley could not tell. "Who am I that I should presume to disavow the truth. I am amazed that Kings do so, and the universe still stands."

"Drink a glass while I look for something," said Burghley. He got up, and pressed a sliding panel in the wall. Some moments passed, then he produced a paper and spread it out on the table: it was yellow with age and torn at the folds. It still depicted the ancient structure of Christendom, rising by ever-narrowing stages, of which the topmost vanished from the picture. Both men surveyed it in silence—the mysterious fiend dashing in with brandished torch, the pillars aflame, the anguished, helpless Christian near at hand, the building still standing above its wrecked supports as though hovering upon air. At last Burghley spoke:

"The mystery of evil, so they called that drawing. How much we knew in those days—before we actually knew it!"

"And all we still hope for, in despite of hope," said Mornay.

His friend gave him the paper, he smoothed it into its tattered creases, and put it away. "Farewell, Philip," said his friend.

There was not a tear in either man's eyes, indeed their faces were harder than before. But contrary to habit they embraced.

THE VANQUISHED

His Catholic Majesty was receiving absolution on his knees. The confessor laid his open hand on the thinning locks of that bent head, then helped the King to rise. "Draw the curtain!" said Don Philip curtly to the priest, as though he were speaking to a lackey. In that moment he was cleansed of his sins and acknowledged no spiritual

superior. Until they come creeping back again, thought the priest, to whose experience the Catholic Majesty was a man like other men. However, he obeyed, drew back the curtain from the window, and extinguished a last lingering taper. It was fixed against the wall above the table, backed by a silver shield that threw its reflection down upon the outspread papers. There had been many tapers when the night began, but they had gone out one by one above that sleepless head.

The faint grey light of a Spring dawn glimmered into the room. The priest marked the King's red eyelids and suggested opening the window. "Wait until I bid you," growled the ageing monarch. "I am in no hurry for the day!" He sat and closed his eyes. "No hurry for the din and turmoil, and least of all for the lewd desires of men." He was clad in black, with but little white about his person: his garments were creased, and his hands stained with dust and ink. His chin sagged askew on to the limp ruff, as his head drooped forward and he sank at last into an uneasy slumber. As the King began to snore, the priest glanced up and down the desolate street. At the corner could be espied the corpse of a horse, forgotten there since yesterday or since the week before, with only its upturned belly visible. As the sun rose, the flies would come. The houses, colourless in the bleak twilight, stood aloof in a closed semicircle round the Royal castle, wearing an even meaner and more submissive air, across that unpeopled void; no lurking shadows now round those crouching habitations, only the castle towering up to the first light of day.

Far below, beneath the window, could be seen a beggar-boy, dragging an enormously fat woman, as ragged as the boy, but three times his age. Both had clearly spent the night on a stone bench between the pillars of the palace, now they were picking over the refuse, to get the tit-bits before the others came. When the lad espied something eatable, he clouted the crone and she bustled towards it. He was master. The priest thought scornfully of worldly

masters, especially of the one now snoring at his back. But the sleeper started up, at once recovered his senses and said : "Enough. The world knows no rest. There could never be any true rest for this world."

"Not even in the square beneath your room," agreed the priest. "Rest and peace are with God alone. It is the King's mission to punish men for their vain desires—and give them a good clout behind," this last remark vanished between his teeth.

"My mission," repeated the King. "Why, then, do I not succeed—and, as the days pass, less and less? The empire and its iron peace, more than once was I near to spreading it over Christendom. But a rebel always rises up and thwarts me. Why does God allow an insolent captain——"

"A heretic," corrected the priest. "He may not dispense with heretics, their downfall adds continually to His glory."

"And to my troubles. My sleeplessness, my maladies, and all the temptations of the soul. This barbarous earth is an unwholesome dwelling-place. A day without revolt and heresy, and I should at last be ripe for peace everlasting."

"Amen," said the Father.

"Instead of which I lose battles, and an insolent captain wins them. What profit is there in my Catholic Majesty? In Paris they choose him King of France. A kingdom is slipping from my grasp, the key to my whole Empire, the last that I must add to my father the Emperor's domains; then the world would be subjected and redeemed."

"It is beyond your powers. You should be more humble."

Don Philip's voice suddenly grew shrill. "Is that captain humble? He recants, he enters the bosom of the Church, and soon he will be King of France. And you allow this. The French bishops are gathered about him at this hour, they instruct him in the faith, he will but laugh at them and profess what they please. Then he

will enter Paris—with his mistress ; a rebel, heretic, and libertine, and you allow it.”

“ You gave only eighty thousand *talers* to buy France.”

“ I did much more than that. I caused Pope Clement to decree that no priest should come near him. And now they are all thronging round him, only too ready to favour this pagan, this philosopher, who is standing out for his own terms. And I am cheated of a kingdom because you betray the faith.”

“ Say rather that you lacked resolve to win it.” The priest thrust his head forward. “ Why were you not yourself in Paris at the Infanta’s side, to proclaim her Queen of France ? This captain is there, and answers for himself. And you think to win a kingdom, sitting at a table ! Why, you have lost heart already, and it is a shaky table.” He grasped and shook it, and when the King half rose from his chair the priest waved him back. “ The question is not whether the Church does her duty by you ; that is presumption. The question is whether you are doing your duty by the Church ; and that will be considered in Rome.”

At these words the King recoiled and sank back into his chair : the priest towered up before him like a black-clad giant. Don Philip’s face contracted at the blow, eyes and nose and mouth dwindled into a patch of wrinkled skin. All that was left of his crushed face was a scanty beard, a narrow forehead, shining faintly in the grey of dawn, and a few wisps of colourless hair straggling over the egg-shaped skull.

Then, as the moments passed, fear was mastered. Don Philip turned his chair with its back to the window, so that the priest had to walk round it. “ Duty,” said the King, reflected, and then said once more : “ Duty—that has been my whole life. Let Rome consider what she will, nothing can alter that.” The priest, not troubling to answer, blinked at the growing light, while the face that was King Philip’s reappeared, and what a face was that !—arrogant, inhuman, and remote, with all the feline

cunning of the hours of mastery. He had no need to raise his voice ; his subjects from his uttermost domains would have understood him from mere terror.

"I ruled the empire of the world here, from this table ; what need have I to use my limbs. Before my mind alone has the earth bowed down, and a waft of my will has moulded it like clay. There are foolish captains who ride up and down, men without vision, men trammelled by their sluggish minds. This captain is one of them : but I—I move with the speed of angels."

The priest made no movement. So far, he thought, 'tis well enough. Soon he will grow bemused and end with a tirade of abuse.

"I am pure, too, as the angels are. Like the unembodied spirits, I abstain from flesh, and this by the force of my own mind, like all else that I have done. You have made me pray and confess my sins ; I could the more easily have taken flesh into my arms, as does this captain, for you would have given me absolution. It needed no favour from the Lord on High to make me one of His elect. All this was achieved by my mind and will—and thus I ruled the empire of the world without yielding to the lust for human flesh. It has never yielded to my touch, nor wafted its fragrance on me, nor moistened with desire in my arms. Soft flesh is for the enjoyment of this captain, for the kingdom of heaven is not, nor ever will be his."

What matter, thought the priest in silence, as flesh comes thus into your speech, and haunts your every thought.

"At last the blow will fall and fling him into uttermost hell." Don Philip no longer masked his fervour, he spoke in a sort of chant, with upturned eyes. "The hands of God will soon be outstretched to set me beside His throne : that great throne with rounded pillars, whence comes all the splendour, not from the Lord Himself ; he abides in shadow, as I do here. But that splendour falls on flesh—the immaterial flesh of angels. They are clad in female forms of wondrous beauty, and outstretch

them to the touch, though not with any mortal motion, nor any such traffic with the flesh as is the usage of this captain."

The priest conceived that his moment was at hand. He said in a markedly indulgent tone: "What do you know of Heaven, Don Philip? Your deeds have brought no favour from Heaven upon your empire, which indeed lies sorely stricken. Between you, who are wholly and entirely upon the hither side, and eternal salvation, stands the Church; forget it not."

At this, a set, despairing look came upon Don Philip's face. He tried to protest that he was speaking as a Christian, who had just confessed and was for the moment without sin. Which made no impression on the priest, who grew more peremptory still.

"Sins of thought. What you have confessed, and are so continually confessing, are sins of thought, and in them you are belly-deep. You would be sanctified. That depends on me alone. My word will undo your deeds and wipe out your thoughts."

"Do you believe that?" asked Don Philip, now in utter bewilderment, as the priest could tell from his pale eyes.

"Sleep," he said imperiously; "and take care not to dream. Alas! the licentiousness of the King of France is the cause of your temptations: I have long known it. Sleep; I will plead for you, and you shall awaken without sin; until the next time."

Don Philip closed his eyes, but upon his own breast there was no rest for that uneasy head; it should have lain and found forgetfulness upon another's; upon that soft and fragrant flesh for which his being so craved. Don Philip was troubled lest the priest, on guard before him, might divine his every sin of thought, and even see them as they were. For some while he feigned to be asleep. When he made the motions of awakening, no priest was in the room. Don Philip rose with an effort, shuffled to the window, opened the shutter and peered out.

The sunlight had reached the depths, and the ground beneath the castle walls was flooded with radiance. On the far side of the roadway the houses lay dark and shuttered. The deep furrows in the unpaved square, the potholes choked with refuse, stood out harshly in the clear light, and dust swirled past in the dawn breeze. Some beggar boys dashed round the corner : Don Philip withdrew his head, thinking himself observed. No : a litter turned into the square, a silken couch set upon two wheels, drawn by three mules, and shaded by a gold-embroidered canopy. The driver, who was walking at the side, vainly slashed his whip at the rabble of boys, who grabbed at the harness, flung themselves before the mules in a struggling heap, and came near to wrecking the whole equipage. The lackey dropped his whip, and a tirewoman flung money among the yelling horde. Then the lady rose from her cushions.

A sumptuous and opulent lady, but not a lady of the Court, Don Philip was well assured of that. She looked about her, perhaps for help, perhaps to see if she were observed ; but no one was about at such an hour. Only Don Philip, peering out from behind his curtain. A luxuriant beauty, her bosom framed in black silk and bared to view. Indeed she put out a bare leg from her litter, to get a better view of her tormentors. But Don Philip felt that her intention was that she herself should be seen, and seen by him—though this could scarce be so. The hour was too early, a person of this kind did not leave her bed in the doubtful expectation that an elderly potentate would be peering round his curtain after a sleepless night. He was deluded by his bad conscience, and the evil that he did in thought held him at the window.

Who—he asked himself—am I ? Nations must row upon my galleys. And I ? A prisoner—without joy, without flesh. Ten paces through yonder little doorway into the chapel, and there I stand before the Lord, untrammelled by any other presence. What this priest will never learn is that the Lord has speech with me, as with

an equal. Wherefore indeed He gives me my dismissal at my own table. And he said aloud : " I am a prisoner, I Philip, next unto God."

" Blaspheme not," said the Father. " Next unto God, and a prisoner—who ever heard the like ? " he spoke in a voice of harsh contempt. " Silence ! " hissed the King between his teeth.

He barely glanced over his shoulder, now not in the least perturbed at this sudden apparition of the grim and towering figure. And Don Philip said imperiously, to his accustomed taskmaster. " Who is that woman ? "

The priest, after but one look, answered : " Everyone knows her. The most notorious harlot in the city. I am her director. And I would have you know that I have through her discovered conspiracies against your safety."

" Fetch her."

" For what purpose ? She has lately confessed, there will be nothing new."

" On your life, you shall go and bring her."

The priest had understood, and his disgust was written on his face in a look that passed from pious horror into plain contempt, and yet was touched with a sort of kindness. " I should bring you a grievous sin," said he in a matter of fact tone. " Moreover there would be witnesses, for there are some in the palace who have already risen. Wait until to-night."

Philip merely looked at him, with the result that the priest backed towards the door. " I must consult my superiors. Your purpose may be venial, as your sins of thought are getting the upper hand." So saying, he left the room. Don Philip paced up and down before the window like a sentry ; every time he turned he made sure that the litter was still there, and that Madam Flesh had still one foot upon the ground. Madam, was now, like a true-bred harlot, hurling the filthiest abuse at the rabble for breaking one of the reins, while the driver tried to re-harness the mule. Don Philip swung sharply round with no shuffling of his feet this time, and at every turn

his anger and his fear increased. The litter and the lady would be gone before the cursed priest arrived. Then, as he strode back and forth, he was aware of a movement in the room, a shadow on the wall. It was the nobleman who brought him his chocolate ; his orders were to be as silent and invisible as a shadow. Don Philip, now beside himself, roared :

“ Drink it yourself ! ”

The nobleman was so dumbfounded that the cup clattered in his hand. He had received the cup from a chamberlain, who took it from a page, who had it from a lackey, and he from another of his kind, all having received the salver from the imposing cook, to whom it had been handed by a long succession of kitchen-men, at the far end of which was some scullion who had boiled the chocolate. The unlucky nobleman thought with all the speed of fear. On its way through all these hands the chocolate had cooled, but it might also have been poisoned by a hand unknown. . . . The King knew it, conceived him guilty and therefore bade him drink. He drank, and promptly fell down in a faint. Don Philip did not heed him, for the priest had at last reached Madam Flesh.

The Father knew how to be expeditious. In five bare words he made the matter clear to the illustrious harlot ; she, with great presence of mind, refused, and the price was promptly raised. She was on her way to early Mass (she said), for good reasons of her own, she would not be stopped, her salvation counted for more than an old gentleman's caprice. Don Philip guessed what was going forward. He struck his bell, which did not awaken the unconscious nobleman ; but a secretary was waiting outside, and the clatter of the bell brought him running in. “ Go down at once. Double the Father's offer.”

The figure was already so outrageous as to take the priest's breath away. “ But what a recommendation it will be ! Think how you can raise your prices, daughter ! ” But she insisted on going to early Mass ; and why she was going, she knew only too well. When the secretary

dashed up, she laughed at his offer. "Old pig," said she, and for the first time looked up at the King's window. Don Philip quivered to his marrow. He forgot to draw back, and the Sovereign and the harlot took each other's measure. Her eyes flashed through a lace veil, his strained through a haze of madness and of torment.

The woman got into her litter, which was ready to move, and she waved it forward. She snapped out an answer over her shoulder to the priest and secretary. Don Philip, in one single leap, dashed at his nobleman who was rising feebly from the floor. "Stop her! Only stop her, and she may have all she asks."

With that, the deed was irrevocable, so thought the harlot to herself as she turned and went with the three envoys. She had protested that she wanted to go to Mass, and that for a very good reason. She had given her warning. On the previous day she had observed suspicious symptoms, and had gone out at the most secret hour to pray that the disease might be averted. She had been prevented from praying, so the disease must come. And a few days later, it became apparent that Don Philip, the Ruler of the World, was infected.

MEDITATION

The momentous crises of life are not reached by such a man as Henri as the result of long reckoning nor of sudden resolve. He sets himself in the due direction as yet unconscious of it, or, knowing it, he is incredulous of the goal. He is led on the way he means to go, there are times when he divines the ordeal before him; but it lies so far ahead. He has started on that journey, he can scarce turn back, it is a doubtful enterprise, which he can hardly look to see fulfilled—when behold!—he is at that journey's end. It was a dream. Not for one moment had Henri conceived himself a dreamer: he, who was so constantly in action. Strokes and counterstrokes, all that a man must

do to win a kingdom, and hold the heart of a woman adored : victories and defeats—how can a man dream in the midst of deeds ? Battles, sieges, and pacts, cities conquered, cities bought, and so too with men : cajoled, outwitted, paid, or overmastered. When his enemy, Mayenne, tried to seduce his Catholics, he countered by persuading his adversaries to meet him in council, until they admitted that their only reason for withholding allegiance from the King was his religion. Whereupon he of course made known to the assemblage, through an Archbishop in fact, that all was well, for he would change it.

That promise he had often made, and many mistrusted him, as was no matter for surprise. Still, in Paris they chose neither the little Soissons, who could scarce have expected to be chosen, nor the Infanta, since the Spanish party was discredited by its atrocities. They chose the rightful King, whether he abjured heresy or not. It was indeed assumed that he would abjure, whereby many misgivings would be set at rest. If he fobbed them off afterwards, the guilt was no one's, not even his. Many came to recognize that he had a conscience, and the right to one. Men grow tolerant when they have suffered long enough from their own obstinacy. Those who thought themselves best informed curtly denied that he would recant. "The man from Béarn will never change his creed for profit," said an ambassador. And Henri liked the saying, though he then stood upon the verge.

The bishops and prelates gathered round him, instructed him in the faith of the majority, or rather—they met or tried to meet his arguments, for Protestant Jeanne's son was no mean adversary in theology. Three days before the event he had so long foreseen, he was still contending vehemently against the doctrine of Purgatory, which he called a sorry jest : did these gentlemen take it seriously ? He packed them off with their Form of Recantation, and they went, to reappear later with another. But the Papal Legate had forbidden them even to approach

the heretic. Henri for his part announced, and caused it to be recorded ; that whatever he did, he was answerable solely to his conscience, and if his conscience said him nay, not for four kingdoms like his own, would he desert the faith in which he had been bred. When he had uttered these words, and the cowed secretaries had taken them down, a great silence fell.

Not upon the assemblage, where there was more argument : and much discussion and debate. That silence laid hold upon the soul of Queen Jeanne's son. Never in his life had the sound of the outer world been thus stilled, never had he stood so utterly alone. For the first time he observed that he was dreaming. He had merely seemed to act, his will and his impulse had been but a muttering in sleep. What was happening within him he did not understand. He struggled in vain for the word that would scatter the delusion. He had become the denizen of a dream. One word—and he would know many things : even who he was.

That night Gabrielle wept. At her side lay Henri, watching her in silence. It was the first time that she had used their nightly companionship to implore him to recant. Neither by day nor in the privacy of the bed-chamber had she intruded upon matters of creed. She knew instinctively that herein her body and his love could not turn the scale, or they would do so without words uttered and tears shed. Tears indeed did not come to her with ease. The charming Gabrielle was not tearful. She had no gift for pleading, she disliked expressing gratitude, and seldom betrayed emotion. Meantime her aunt de Sourdis had appeared, and told her with much insistence how matters stood. The King was wayward and uncertain, he argued with the prelates and appealed to his conscience : why ?—when a man had resolved upon a step, and had in fact already taken it.

“Not a step,” replied Gabrielle. “He calls it a leap, and he lately wrote to me : ‘On Sunday I shall take the death leap.’”

She said this in a quavering tone. The wily old lady sensed at once that sentiment was invading this business, to the disfavour of practical good sense. So she passed over all such lesser considerations, such as the interests of religion, the condition of the kingdom, or even the risk to a Christian woman's soul when she lives with a heretic. She took her stand on serious arguments, and said : " Would you have your father turned out of Noyon ? And Monsieur de Sourdis from Chartres ? And is Monsieur de Cheverny to surrender the seals, all on account of your obstinacy ? The King will lose the game and have to flee from his enemies, like the rest of us, and the fault will be yours. But I am still here. What ? If you had a heart for your besotted cuckold, would you refuse to do the one thing that would make him recant ? "

" And what is that ? " asked Gabrielle, not without alarm.

" Withhold your body. Then he will do his duty. And I am come here to set you in the way that you should go ! "

" I don't believe it," said Gabrielle : which damped the old lady's eloquence.

" Gabrielle, you are sorely changed."

She made a show of dabbing a kerchief on her painted eyes.

" Pray think of us all, and the poverty and persecution that we know too well and that now threaten us once more : my dear child, think, if not of us, at least of yourself. Only his conversion to the true Church can safeguard your future. He will get a divorce, he will marry—and raise you to the throne. All this still stands to-day in your power, and you know how power looks ; just as you do, deep-bosomed and with rounded limbs. If you let it slip to-day, —this very night, or to-morrow, fortune will have fled beyond your reach. Then you will have brought him ill-fortune ; and in ill-fortune he will live and die. If you feel for him in this little matter of recantation, surely you will spare him what will be far worse. At every turn ill-fortune will

be yours. And in ill-fortune, my beloved child, believe me,—in ill-fortune, no woman can keep a man, and Henri least of all."

But Gabrielle's fears had vanished. She smiled a slow smile and shook her head. She was secure; and she would hold him. At this Dame Sourdis fell into a fury: she stamped, she raved, she poured forth a torrent of shrill abuse.

"Too stupid for a whore!" was the end of it. "And we depend on such a creature as this." Wherewith she raised her hand: Gabrielle caught it before it fell.

"Aunt Sourdis," she said, in a strangely unruffled tone. "I was touched by one thing that you said. So I will shed tears to-night."

"I am very glad to hear it." The old lady was already pacified. "And you will withhold your body from him too?"

To that question Gabrielle made no reply; she opened the door to admit her ladies.

When, that night, she lay sobbing with her head pillowed on her lovely arms, Henri did not ask the reason; and, as Gabrielle noticed, despite her lamentations, he was no longer looking at her and her parade of grief, but was staring at the carved canopy of the bedstead, on which the reflection from the taper on the night-table flickered to and fro. Gabrielle was baffled, it would be very hard to prevail upon the King as she had promised. She sobbed more bitterly, and begged him in God's name to recant; he had given his word, and if he did not he was lost. Did he hear her? His expression was that of one listening to something he could not understand. Suddenly she ceased moaning, fell silent, and her heart spoke. Its voice was scarce above a whisper.

"We are going to have a son."

She forgot that she had blinked twice, as though caught in a guilty act, when he had called her the mother of his child, and since then he had made no mention of the matter. In that night hour it came upon her that he was indeed

its father, nor did she ever again doubt that he was so. For in that hour she began to love him ; and she did so because she felt for him, and because he was beyond her understanding. But he had marked the soft utterance of her heart, he laid his cheek to hers, she clasped him in her arms, and one of her tears, a real tear, trickled into his mouth. Thus, for a while, they lay.

She closed her eyes, and let sleep come ; but she felt that he was still lying as before, guarding his secret. And she said, already half asleep :

“ My dear lord, what do you see above you ? ”

And he murmured, between his deep-drawn breaths :
“ I would not see, I would hear, and I am waiting for a word. It is no use to think, only to listen. When the silence within me is deepest, comes the sound of a viol, I know not whence. Deep, dark tones, rightly cadenced for that word. But the word does not come. It is very strange.”

When Gabrielle awoke, he had gone ; he was back with his prelates, who were instructing him in the faith, this for the last time : no more questioning nor hesitation. So to-day, a Saturday, they kept him five hours at one sitting, the last of all, and he too had no thought of curtail-ing it, indeed he feared the finish of the orations, for that day they were little else.

In another room of the old Abbey of Saint-Denis, during these momentous hours, the King's mistress and his sister were sitting together. The Princess Catherine had come just like Dame de Sourdis, and with the same dispositions ; but the intent of them was different. Her brother was to recant, that he might achieve greatness. She hoped he would be forgiven, though she was not too hopeful ; she did not know whether, in God's estimation, a kingdom ranked before a soul. Wherefore she felt deeply for her brother ; he was the head of their House, which was fated to rule, and must pay the price ; but, that—pray God—should not be his salvation. At need, thought Catherine, she would herself have recanted, to mount

the throne with her poor Soissons. She would have been damned, but her brother saved. And now he was to be a great King ; Soissons had never been of much account, none knew that better than she did. She had never seriously meant to play her brother false : only to save him from disaster.

Her journey thither had indeed been in some measure a flight from Soissons, who had blamed her because he had not been chosen King. He thought she had worked against him, and for her brother : they had parted on bad terms, as they often did, but their quarrels did not last. They had lost too many good occasions to want to sacrifice their companionship itself. They would, as before, be reconciled, though Catherine none the less felt occasional gusts of fear. She sat beside her brother's mistress, brooding, more upon him than on her own account. Gabrielle too ; and if nothing else, the foreboding that came from each to other by a mere waft of feeling, had set them both at one. There was much else also to incline them thus, and most of all :—Catherine knew that a child was on the way.

When the women spoke, it was in a whisper, but they were mostly silent, as befitted that tense, oppressive hour in the old Abbey.

"They have been pressing him for a long while now. Can he have signed ?" said the sister.

"All is ready for to-morrow. To me he says neither yes nor no, he listens, looks upwards and is secret," answered the mistress. There was a long pause before she went on in an undertone :

"I wish that he might have been spared it all ! Especially now—" this almost inaudibly—"when I am expecting a child. When he expects me to bear him a son."

The sister understood from Gabrielle's mere breathing ; or guessed her meaning from the way she passed her hands over her body. She embraced Gabrielle, and said into her ear : "We are of the same family. I too await your child."

That was the utterance that had been in Gabrielle's mind since her lord's sister had been in her company. She was accepted ; a stranger no more. Strange indeed now seemed to her the calculations of her aunt Sourdis. If she was to be Queen, and Queen indeed, then it would come by ordinance of nature, through her body, and because the King's sister, who was stroking it with questing fingers, was henceforward her sister too.

Catherine went softly back to her seat. The lovely face, as she could see, was marked by weariness and sorrow, but she was fruitful. Her own face was withering unfulfilled, and would never bloom again, not even in another and smaller one, for she would never have a child. It was hard not to be jealous. That light-hearted brother of hers—well, this time he knew his own mind and would hold to it ; there was no chance in that quarter. . . . Ah, my dear, but Queen ? You will never be Queen ; wait, I know him. He will put you off until it is too late.

Meantime the Princess's eyes were straying round the meagrely furnished room. Only one treasure ; a picture of the Virgin lavishly set with variegated jewels. At Catherine's yet unuttered question, Gabrielle blushed and turned away ; so Catherine did not ask it. . . . Very well, my dear. They bribed you with presents to prevail on him at last—with tears, I suppose, and all manner of heart-breaking lamentations, by night, in the act of love.

Scarce had the thought crossed her mind, when Catherine covered her eyes, and said : " Forgive me. What he is about to do is no fault of yours. The fault is in the circumstances that each and all beset him, and the people that each and all betray him. I also have done so in my time ; I also."

She had for the first time raised her voice, for it was her conscience that spoke. My poor brother ! Here the door opened—not flung gaily back, as was usual when her brother entered. But it was he.

When he looked up, for he had been staring blankly before him, he was aware of the two creatures whom he

loved the most, he grew promptly boisterous and gallant. He kissed them, twirled his sister round, knelt before Gabrielle, caressed her and laughed. But they marked his impatience to be gone, and in truth he was not really in their company. He fell to mimicking his prelates and bishops, their voices and their persons. It was to be feared that His Lordship of Bourges might at any moment sprout wings and start for Heaven. The women watched him, with faces quite unmoved. Suddenly he broke off, turned his ear to the window, listened, waited, and went out.

"How he has changed," said Catherine deeply shocked. But Gabrielle bowed her head for shame that he had been sad in her company.

Henri went down into the old garden; it was, for him, the recreation hour. He compared it with those in the *Collegium Navarra*, when he had been a little school-boy, and had played between lessons with two friends now dead. Suddenly he found himself at the spot where poor Esther had been brought to him by Pastor La Faye. Between Henri then, and Henri now, there were long years of innocence, of guilt, of knowledge and of ignorance. He stopped, and caught a conversation behind a hedge. It was carried on in whispers, like every other on that tense and lowering day.

A voice: "He will put his old friends to death. How can he help it?"

Another: "Later—perhaps. If he has not forgotten in the meanwhile. We know him to be ungrateful. His new friends have yet to find him out."

A third: "So easily moved to tears, so light, and so forgetful—but which of us does not love him?"

A fourth: "Not the man he is now. But the man who sailed into harbour in that little ship."

Henri was moving on, when the first voice began again: "Every man among us must look to his own safety."

"Nonsense, Turenne," said Henri, as he appeared. "I am your man, and I think to remain so. You shall convince yourselves of that when the time comes."

He laid hold of Agrippa d'Aubigné from among the rest, stepped aside with him and said into his ear : " For your sake I risk my salvation." This with wide eyes and burning eyelids ; not lightly nor forgetfully, nor with any sign of tears. Agrippa was shaken by pity ; how could this man fail to win affection ?

None the less, Agrippa was the only one whose heart went out to him ; as was then indeed made plain, though the older, pleasanter days had encompassed Henri with much easy friendship. But the warmth of that one heart set him aglow before he sauntered on, to be alone, after his habit, and to catch what he might hear. Once past the hedge he turned towards Philip Mornay, his envoy, who had arrived with weighty news, and had not yet been received by the King.

" Monsieur Duplessis, that little ship—you helped me to sail it into harbour ; but could you choose it ? It is another harbour now."

He soon reached the far end of the garden, where birds were twittering, but—alas !—not birds alone. Over the low wall two heads were bobbing up and down, each trying to convince the other of the most innocent intentions. " Pray be our friend, Monsieur de Rosny," fluted Madame de Sourdis. " You are really so already, for you need us as much as we need you."

" It is even so and not otherwise, honoured Madam,"—whereat Rosny dived, and Madame de Sourdis emerged.

" The Grand Mastership of Artillery is a small matter now," she said in a tone of roguish assurance : " For one snipe that flies away you shall shoot ten."

" If only *you* do not take wing," sighed the Baron, and sank out of sight once more.

" The King will get a divorce, and marry Madame de Liancourt. Advise him well, and you are well advised. You rogue !" tittered the lady, and submerged. In her place appeared the cavalier, with that smooth face of his which could utter anything with unruffled dignity.

" I have laid the plan with him already, my good lady.

He is only recanting that he may make his mistress Queen. Once the stroke is played, all will promptly become Protestants—the King, the Queen, and even you, dear lady.”

At this, the Sourdis remained for a while below, and when she reappeared once more her eyes were hard. She had understood that he was mocking her. “You will be sorry for this,” she hissed. Her gown positively whistled through the air as she whisked round. A door slammed. Rosny, his face still unperturbed, went on into the garden ; there on a bench sat the King. Henri allowed his astute and faithful servant to approach before he asked in a hoarse undertone :

“And your true opinion, now, in this last hour ? ”

“Sire, if the Catholic faith is understood and received in the right sense, it might be of great advantage.”

“You said that long ago. Nothing else ? ”

“The next world.” Rosny paused. “For that I can give no warrant.” And his smooth face puckered slowly into a laugh. But before the laugh broke, the King was up and away. And what Rosny found remarkable,—he sang. It was growing dark beneath the trees, and like a child he sang in the darkness.

Lights had in the meantime been lit in the refectory of the old Abbey, and their reflection shone into the garden. As the King came into the shafted beams, he ceased his strange singing, some conversations in the half storey above the hall ceased, and the lawyers, whom he had summoned to his presence, trooped through the open windows to await him.

Henri ran up the steps. The vestibule beyond the illuminated doorway was all the darker, and Henri was invisible as he stood there and looked at the desolate hall ; so small an assemblage made the space seem larger and more empty than it was. My men, thought Henri—and thus indeed they looked. Presidents and Councillors in threadbare raiment, with deep shadows under eyes that still glittered with fever and the privations of mortal perils

long endured, officers of the Law, like those before them and those yet to come, they had steadfastly resisted force in the name of law. Justice is indeed not law. It may be a dexterous evasion of the law and its pronouncements. Not a single Protestant among them, thought Henri ; and yet they fought for the kingdom no less than my warriors of Coutras, Arques and Ivry, and without their battles mine would have been in vain. They took the side of the persecuted against the men of power, and stood to arms against the mighty robbers. Thus I too conceived my part, and I have won back plundered lands for thousands upon thousands of my peasants, every one of them : that was my kingdom. Yours is law ; thus you conceive your part in the world of men."

He stepped forward, his hat upon his head, nor did they remove their shabby hats ; and he said to them :
" My learned brethren :—

" We have ridden through the land and swung the sword, my learned brethren. And because we were men of our hands, we now stand here, and the door of our capital is opened to us. The Parliament of Paris has unbarred it for me : your President Brisson's awful death was the first sign and the last warning."

The King took off his hat and bowed, and the men of his Parliament did likewise. After a pause for memories unuttered, the First President of Rouen, Claude Groulart, spoke ; though a Catholic like the rest, he was solely concerned that the King should not abjure his creed, were it against his conscience. And Henri answered :

" I have at all times sought only my salvation, and always prayed to the Divine Majesty that I might be given grace to find it. The Divine Majesty revealed to me, that as a consequence of the abominations committed in Paris by others,—though I myself must answer for them—my salvation is bound up with the establishment of law, which is the fullest measure of humanity that I know."

This delighted the men of law, and they shouted ;
" Long live the King ! "

Henri now no longer stood aloof, he mixed freely among them, and explained familiarly to more than one what trouble he had had with the Divine Majesty before his recantation was approved. He did not speak of a death leap, though the thought was present in his mind. All this had befallen him beneath the walls of his capital, a city filled with horror. There he came truly into God's presence. It is written : Thou shalt not kill ; and this law was so human that it might well be from God.

"Likewise a King who respects his fellow men and their lives as well," interposed a voice. He himself made light of his own part, and assured them he had been mainly moved by the instruction from the prelates and, praise be to the Holy Ghost, he was beginning to acquire a taste for their teachings and their arguments. Whereupon he led his men of Parliament to a table set out at the back of the hall, and offered them other than spiritual fruits ; piles of melons and figs, dishes of meats, and flagons of wine. It was long since they had enjoyed such things, they ate with gusto, and by the time anyone felt disposed to look up, Henri was gone.

He lay down without eating, and promptly went to sleep. When he awoke, it was morning, and Pastor La Faye was at his bedside. Henri bade him sit down, embraced the old man, and asked him once again : whether it was true that the qualities of man could change their meaning as time passed, according to what La Faye had maintained ? It was indeed so, replied the Pastor.

"His faith too ?" Henri went on. "May it now signify what is false, having once been the true faith ?"

"Sire ! You will be forgiven. Go to the cathedral with a joyful heart, that our Lord and our God may also rejoice."

Henri sat up, he laid his head against that withered breast that so yearned to comfort him. And thus, in the arms of his ancient friend, he said :

"My reasons for recanting are entirely worldly. There are three. First, I am afraid of the knife. Second, I would

marry my dear lady. Third, I want to possess my capital in peace. Now give me quittance."

"Your torment has been great ; I give you quittance," said Pastor La Faye, and departed.

The First Chamberlain d'Armagnac clothed the King entirely in white—like a boy for confirmation, thought Henri to himself. He stood up a man renewed : it would scarce be believed that this was the fifth occasion. A God had long since ceased to attend the ceremony. The Devil, if he existed—

"I wonder you did not take a bath beforehand," Armagnac reminded him.

"I shall need it more afterwards," replied Henri. And from his tone, that astute retainer gathered that he had better go.

Henri was alone, but he could not understand for what purpose he had wanted to be so. Where was Gabrielle ? In silent agreement she was that day sharing a room with Catherine. All had left him ; but he would soon be escorted by a glittering throng, through crowds of his people gathered to watch him abjure his faith. Not merely abjure the man that he had been : but make his peace with the majority and take their colour. What was he ? A sack crammed with dust, like the rest. Until yesterday he had striven and disputed with the prelates over words. God had not listened ; He was wearied by all matters of faith, and cared no more for one creed than the other. He deemed our fervour childish, and our purity He rejected as mere pride. Henri's Protestants did not know Him, for He had never led them by that thorny path, and they presumed to speak of treachery when a man followed life, and listened to his voice of reason.

Meantime, he was not called upon to think ; over his festal garments of white silk, embroidered with gold to the tips of his toes, he hung his black cloak, put on his black hat, and bent his black plume so that it nodded as he moved. Suddenly he heard the strains of a viola, the very same that seemed to reach his ears when he had

stood and listened during those tumultuous days ; and the word he sought remained unuttered ; nothing but those ghostly cadences. The sound grew louder, as though it were no longer a fantasy but real music ; Henri understood that all was now ready and in order ; the thoughts that had possessed his mind, and the garments of white and gold and black that arrayed his person. Daily, in his fears and doubts, in exaltation and abasement, he had meditated on how the soul constructs her creations from calculation and from dream. . . . For these he risked his soul's salvation ! Thus he groaned, until he remembered the trump card—that his salvation was the re-establishment of law. He sang in the darkness, because he had been made afraid of the other world. But he knew that men were born to seek the truth, not to possess it, which only the Power on the other side can do. It was for him to rule on this side ; here and now was his terror of the knife. A vile confession, but he made it. Did he love Gabrielle the more : or did he fear the knife the more ? But he also conceived of inhumanity as the most abominable of crimes, and nothing, not even woman, did he reverence like reason.

All this sped, effortless and in a flash, through his liberated spirit, because he had known and weighed it all before, and in what moods of darkness and oppression he could barely call to mind. Indeed he thought that pure enchantment, like music, had rapt him to some white and golden realm of bliss—but the melody grew rounder and richer, although indeed it was not rendered in very accomplished fashion. Who could it be, if not Agrippa ? Henri stepped out upon the balcony, and behind the nearest bush he espied the hand that drew the bow. He laughed and beckoned, and Agrippa showed himself in his everyday doublet ; he wore no festal garb and did not mean to go to the ceremony. He would not be present when Henri abjured the Religion ; but he was playing to the King, on that ecstatic instrument known as the *viola d'amore*.

At first Henri's chin quivered faintly, for was he not

easily moved to tears? But he noticed in time that the excellent Agrippa was making merry in all innocence and affection. So Henri winked, and the other did likewise; down yonder the old friend, with homage born of irony and kindness; above him, the white-clad candidate for confirmation, with his grey beard and weathered skin. In the end they both gave up the effort to be dignified; Henri aped a stately lady listening to a serenade, Agrippa fiddled frantically and began to whistle an accompaniment; but the moment had passed. The cathedral bells rang out in a shattering peal. Both started; Agrippa disappeared behind the bushes: the King with one leap was back in the room, smoothed down his clothes, passed a hand over his plume to make sure it was duly nodding—and the door opened. They had come to fetch him.

THE ALLIANCE

The great day, as ever God made, was the twenty-fifth of July, 1593; it could be no other than a day of blue sky and very hot. The people of Paris had been forewarned, and had dressed up in their best clothes, such indeed as they had been able to keep through the times of tribulation. They carried armfuls of flowers, and baskets laden with all manner of provisions. The entire Sunday was to be spent at Saint-Denis, for the King's recantation and reception into the Church, which would be a spectacle worth seeing, but a long one; in any case the sacred hour of dinner was likely to be missed. However, so rare an event was well worth it. Afterwards they would camp out on the meadows. The baskets were stowed away so that nothing might be stolen, and all looked forward to a joyful day.

The flowers were strewn upon the streets, in the pathway of the King. He was to be clad in white, so rumour had discovered and proclaimed. His white silk shoes should be crimsoned by crushed roses. The women were sure

he was a handsome Prince, and he should walk ankle-deep in rose leaves ; so they pushed and jostled across the causeway, and several were knocked down. This troubled the victims less than the guards, who first shouted warnings, which were inaudible above the pealing of the bells and the atmosphere of excitement. So the soldiers had to resort to force, and with rough good humour succeeded in pushing back the crowd to each side of the street. At that moment, the procession appeared.

What did the King observe as he walked along the narrow alleyway between the packed throngs on either side ? Gay-coloured fabrics hanging from the windows, the roadway strewn with flowers, and children still flinging roses over the heads of the guards. The people wore the white scarves of the Royal party, and on all faces,—some indeed lantern-jawed and pious, others bubbling with excitement at what they were to see,—there was an air of contentment. There were few that did not cry Long live the King ! The deeper voices of the bells echoed the shouts ; but how poor a jubilation compared with the mighty event which had that day come to pass ! And yet. . . surely. . . from near at hand, the faces were still marked with fear.

Five years, thought the King, five years of terror and misery and riot were behind those faces. Had he done no more than stage this festival for them, it would have been almost enough. But there should be better things to come : how could he fulfil so many and such eager hopes ? . . . His head felt near to sinking under the burden of man's incapacity, for how could he make them happy or even satisfy them all ? But he had to hold it high, that they might stand in expectation of the glory and the power, his and theirs.

The crowd saw him escorted by Princes and Lords, high officers of State, noblemen and a throng of lawyers. Of his own family there were few, though the Count of Soissons had consented to appear. In the van and in the rear marched bodyguards and Switzers, with silent drums. Twelve trumpeters held trumpets to their lips, but blew

no blast, because of the pealing bells, and in token of the sanctity of the event. Of all this the mob was well aware, and indeed the mob always knows very well what is going forward—when it lends a hand to savagery and riot, and when it plays its part in some great and noble ceremony. The people were indeed delighted with their King's magnificent garb, his erect figure and his soldierly carriage. But the high arched brows looked sad, and the eyes were too wide open; forty years old or a little more, and so grey-haired already. Hard it was to say how much remorse, how much misery of their own, had struck at the hearts of these agelong enemies of the King—it was indeed at long last that they had come to do him honour, and now stood there, a welcoming throng. Here it was that among the shouts of salutation a few voices were sorrowfully stilled. A few knees strove to bend—but scarce could do so in the press of people.

An old crone, who certainly had seen many things, said in a voice that was heard by those about her as well as by the King, who was then passing: "He is a handsome man. His nose is larger than the noses of most Kings." A remark that raised more laughter than was its due. The King would have liked to stop: and his drawn brows relaxed. Once again he was tempted to pause, when several onlookers in threadbare leather doublets eyed him—or rather his hat—in steady silence. He remembered that he had worn it last at Ivry. The older men came from even earlier days, they had seen it at Coutras. He sought their eyes, they looked into his, and he watched them until others hid them from his sight.

Outside the cathedral, before Henri set foot on the lowest stair, a strange faintness came upon him. He had to grope with his foot: even the crowds faded, faces and voices grew dim and slipped into the distance. It lasted but the space of one step, then all was as before, except that Henri, as he mounted, saw the fleeting vision of a giant, who stood and blinked to hide the glitter in his eyes. So vividly did he see it that he missed the lowest step;

but thereafter he was wholly set on the part he had to play.

He strode through the great portal : after five or six paces he found himself confronted by the Archbishop of Bourges, arrayed in white damask, and seated on a ceremonial chair surrounded by the prelates. The Archbishop asked who he was, and His Majesty answered : "The King." The said Monsieur de Bourges, who had lost the porcine look aforementioned, was dignity itself as he surveyed the King, and his utterance was the very expression of spiritual power : "What do you desire ?" "I desire," returned His Majesty ; "to be received into the bosom of the Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church." "Do you truly desire this ?" asked Monsieur de Bourges. Whereupon His Majesty made answer : "I do, with all my heart." And kneeling upon a cushion, which the Cardinal de Perron slipped beneath his knees, the King once more made his profession of faith—nor did he forget to pronounce against heresy of any sort ; and he swore to destroy all heretics.

All this was heard in silence, and the profession of his new faith, which the King had written out in his own hand, was even handed by him to the Archbishop, who received it seated ; then at last the Archbishop deigned to stand. For one fleeting moment as he rose, he seemed to the onlookers hesitant and at a loss : and what made him so was the ominous look in His Majesty's wide eyes, those same eyes that at Ivry had held a squadron of enemy lancers spell-bound until help came up. But here there would be no such aid, here he was in their hands. So the Archbishop rose to his feet. Without taking the mitre from his head, he sprinkled the King with holy water, bade him kiss the Cross, and gave him absolution and the blessing.

Both Monsieur de Bourges and Henri knew very well the order of events, but it was a matter of much difficulty to make way through the church to the choir : the throng surged across the nave, clambered up the vaulting, and

crawled through every opening in the great stained windows. In the choir Henri merely had to repeat his oath ; but he did so with some show of impatience and haste. Then they moved behind the high altar, and during the singing of the *Te Deum* Henri made his confession : such was his reception into the Church. In plain fact, Monsieur de Bourges wheezed audibly, and Henri closed his eyes. . . . Did she know he had caught a fleeting glimpse of her behind a pillar ? Lovelier than the women of Paradise, as rich in promise as the night—would that the joyous night had come ! There was a special reason for that yearning : as he made his way through the throng he had heard an utterance let fall by one of the procession. If his own people spoke so, what did Monsieur de Bourges think ? The man was a lawyer, and with his fellows had escorted his master in solemn procession. And now that the King had taken his death leap, here was a man muttering calamity. His neighbour, in the turmoil of the crowd, had not heard the words. Only Henri, always a man of his ears, caught them : they were a prophecy, dark and dreadful.

Thereafter he heard Mass, celebrated by the Archbishop of Bourges ; an oratory had been prepared for the King, of red silk embroidered with gold lilies, topped by a canopy of gold brocade. The King received communion. Then came the awkward task of re-forming the procession in the same order as before, for the return to the Abbey, where a banquet was to be held. The King's escort had in the interval been scattered, and it was some time before most of them could be extricated from the throng. Among his noblemen Henri missed Chicot, known as the Fool—and indeed he would just then have gladly had him at his side, for Chicot brought luck. . . . Ha ! what was that ? A scuffle and a hubbub, under the vaulted roof, among a knot of men each struggling to be first to slide off a carven dragon's head projecting from a pillar, to which they were all clinging in a confusion of arms and legs. Someone took a flying leap—ha ! Chicot !

He plunged and crashed, flinging people to the right and left, but landed astraddle the neck of a huge man lying prostrate on all fours. As though in terror, he clutched at the man's curly hair, until he forced the pock-marked face round and upwards—Henri recognized it, but a little while ago he had seen that familiar blink. There was the man, convulsed with rage, and seemingly with pain too, though Chicot was but tugging at his hair. He made no effort to heave himself up, rider and all, though he was a powerful fellow. Indeed he was apparently too much hurt to crawl, though what had hurt him was not clear ; but as Henri emerged from the great west door he could still hear the fellow bellowing behind him. Still wondering, he led the great procession through the thronging crowd, which the guards now made no effort to restrain. The drummers and trumpeters, oblivious now of the pealing bells, set up a rival clangor.

There was a halt at a corner where a tortuous alleyway opened into the street. Hundreds had jostled forward to get a sight of the King's face ; but none succeeded save an old, old woman : no one pushed her back, and she suddenly found herself sundered from the mob, face to face with the King, not knowing how she had got there. He took both her hands, and she kissed him with lips that grew soft to kiss her King. Whereupon the King said to the old crone : " Daughter," said he ; " Daughter, that was a good kiss, and I'll remember it." He caught some flowers flung at him, gathered them into a bunch, tied it with a ribbon that someone handed him, and slipped the nosegay into the old lady's bosom, which sent the mob nearly frantic with delight.

For a while Henri turned his face to left and right, so that they might see it and be assured of his good will. At that moment he stepped into the alley, and saw—what none else saw, though he gave no sign of it ; Chicot leading his man away. He held his prisoner's arms fast behind his back, and the man, three times the stronger, made no resistance, but limped along hunching his shoulders

Chicot, tall and gaunt and square-set, towered above him. He had lost his hat, his hair stood up wildly over his high bare forehead ; and as he kept his eye fixed upon his prisoner, his hooked nose, his narrow cheekbones, and his truculently tilted beard stood out in sharp outline. Outside a small squat house at a turn in the alley, a hammered sign, from which hung a dried garland, marked a tavern, which would then be quite empty, as the townsfolk and all strangers were accompanying the King along the route to the banquet. Chicot and his giant had but to enter and discuss their affair in the deserted parlour : and he could imagine what would happen.

Henri was hungry, as they all were ; indeed their delight in the splendid festival of reconciliation with the King doubled their appetite and his also : not to mention that he was secretly relieved and thankful at what he had seen in the little alley. In the refectory of the old Abbey his first act was to shout : " Let all men enter ! " The guards withdrew their halberds from the door, and the hall was suddenly as packed with people as the cathedral, and in the press a table and all the food on it was upset. Fortunately they were all in a good humour, and a mob that has just become possessed of a King is careful to do no damage. They would sooner tread on each other's toes than smash a dish. Moreover all the King's gentlemen were most zealous in their courtesies—not, indeed, under orders from the King ; many of them made place for a common man at table and conversed with him.

Most were merely concerned to see the King, as being a King of note, who had much engaged their minds before they saw him face to face. Yonder he sat at the end of the hall, alone on a raised dais. His appetite was excellent, as was plain for all to see : and these were the meditations of a certain peaceful burgher : ' He has made good provision for us ; the times are gone when, on his account, we ate flour out the cemeteries. He does not look like a man to have pressed us so hard as that. He is not what we were told he would be by the Paris preachers,

a beast out of the Apocalypse, nor even a common wolf. I, the peaceful burgher,—for despite the license of the times I was always just a peaceful burgher,—I shall bear witness in the future that he looks like you and me. Never again shall I crawl behind bushes in his garden to spy on him, as I once did, kneeling in the mud until I was so purblind that I couldn't tell whether he was tall or short, nor whether his humour was good or bad. Now I look at him fairly and full face. . . . Ah, they are beginning to troop out into the fields to eat their dinners, there will be room in the hall, and I could wish him a good appetite. But I will not venture. What is it that deters me? Is it his splendid dress—his grey beard, and his lifted brows? No: the reason is that he has invited everyone, sick men and beggars too. I would not care to see them in my house. What a man !'

With such reflections the little burgher discreetly trotted out to join the others in the fields. The company sat long at table. More than once Henri raised his glass to his eyes before he set it to his lips ; then they all turned and pledged him—including the man of Parliament, whom Henri had in mind and meant to single out. He was a lawyer after his own heart, with heavy-lidded, shining eyes, sunken temples and hair completely white ; and a grave beard that masked an ironic mouth. It was not long since he had been starving, though that had not quenched his irony. He had lain in prison, doubting every act not truly tested and based on the inborn rights of mortal men ;—haphazard acts determined only by power and by weakness, and impelled by anger. He compared his own ill star with that of maltreated children crippled for life, when the State is so oblivious of justice that it does not yet realize that these are its own maimed limbs.

Henri loved the man, or he would have paid little heed to what he had heard, for much is heard that makes no matter, especially by ears as acute as his. In the cathedral, when Henri had just recanted, he had passed

the man by. As he did so, the man whispered to his neighbour, who, in all the turmoil, did not catch the dreadful words, but Henri heard them. He set down his glass again, beckoned, and the lawyer came up to the King's seat. "Friend and comrade," began Henri.

"When you lay on damp straw,—and, if the Royal cause had not won, you might easily have been hanged out of the window,—confess that your pulse beat fast. You had ceased to be the sceptic that you wished to be : such was your mood that you would have quartered and beheaded your enemies and burnt them at the stake ; assuming that in that same moment you had been master, and your enemies at your mercy."

"Sire ! It is so. Truth to tell, excepting for brief hours of reason, those were indeed my feelings while in prison. But when I came out I was calm once more and no longer wanted to kill any man."

Henri leaned nearer to him and said : "Would you be now so much the master that you not only could not kill, but could join hands with those who were your enemies by a mere pedantry of faith ?"

"Sire, I would have done as you have done."

Henri paled and said : "Now I realize the horror of what you said by a pillar in the cathedral to a man in a green cloak."

"Sire, I should still remember what I said without the reminder of the green cloak. Pray God it may be wrong. I grieve you should have heard it."

"Is it as you said ? Then all your law would be in vain. You are poor judges if a man must be punished because he tried to act less guiltily and so end a conflict."

"There is no word of punishment," said the other—just so loud that the revellers at the table would not overhear ; "It was a monstrous crime I feared."

"For which I was ripe," said Henri.

The lawyer could consider himself dismissed. He turned with a deprecating air to leave a last apology ; and he expressed it in the words of Montaigne, the humanist.

"A man of good life may hold false opinions, and the truth may fall from the lips of a rascal who disbelieves in it."

Henri watched him go. Of course ; we know all that from our friend Montaigne. It is precisely the wisdom that my ailing but tough old friend gathers from all of us, and returns to us perfected. All the more horrible is what I heard him say in the crowd, all the more horrible and evil.

Therewith he promptly bethought him of his fool. What in the meantime had become of Chicot and his victim? He had better find out which had disposed of the other. Henri half thought of sending soldiers to that tumbledown tavern in the byway. But he did not, for several reasons, not least from self-respect. In one way or another it must have come to light that he had been afraid. But he got up unexpectedly, his guests would otherwise have sat at table for hours.

Back to the cathedral once more, for by way of spiritual conclusion to the banquet, there was to be a sermon from Monsieur de Bourges, and Evensong followed promptly on his last Amen. His Majesty listened to it all with great gravity. Then he mounted his horse, but only to offer up a prayer of thanksgiving in another church some distance away. When he returned to Saint-Denis, it was night, and bonfires had been lit : people who had emptied their baskets and drained their raptures to the dregs that day, were now dancing round huge blazing torches, the nimbler hopping on one leg ; and the sober onlooker could scarce fail to see that there was no more sense in that rejoicing. They had hailed their King that morning because, for love of them, he was treading a very thorny path, and for the righting of old wrongs, had made their cause his own.

Now night had fallen they received him in another and uproarious fashion, which was little to his liking ; moreover he was wearied from that day, more utterly so indeed than if he had been fighting a battle from dawn to

dusk. He reined in his horse and wondered what had been happening in that tavern. Of all that they knew nothing. They were dancing round the flames. Reeling, yelling fools ! He hoped some of them would get soundly scorched. Well, he would ride to the tavern. If he found it empty, then that would be the end of that, as well as of this day, and he was bitterly tired.

The old Abbey lay in darkness, for none expected him. Not his dear lady, though she was certainly awake and listening. But she did not call him, nor did she want him in her room. Alone, until the sun came, they dared make no other venture, for each by instinct knew whether the other's hour was burdensome or light. But he now called for his bath, and his First Chamberlain, Monsieur d'Armagnac, at once sent all the lackeys hot-foot for water. The sound of hurrying footsteps in the darkness roused certain persons from their beds, among them Protestants, and these were over-hasty in their judgment, conceiving that the King was washing himself clean of sin, after hearing so magnificent a Mass !

It was not so.

THE STORY OF A PLOT

Chicot, tall and gaunt and hatless, held the fellow's arms fast against his back, while he stumbled along with his huge shoulders bent. As they made their way in this fashion along the tortuous alley, otherwise deserted—not one bedridden ancient was so much as peering out of a window—it was by no means clear which of the pair was in control of the other. Chicot seemed to be supporting his companion lest he should collapse from some mysterious weakness—unless it was that he had caught a criminal, and was bringing him to a place of safety. Only one of them knew the way ; not the King's Fool, but the other man. He knew that alley, he had suddenly hobbled into it, groaning as he went, and he had the tavern too in mind, while

Chicot was utterly astray. For him the main thing was that they were out of the throng and could bring no scandal on the great procession. The populace were intent upon the solemn hour of dinner. Here came no fragrance of baked meats ; the day was hot, but the darkness of that alley grew danker and more fetid at every step they took. Over it brooded a very miasma of evil : the first house reeked of avarice, the next of lechery, while the last stood steeped in the horror of murder undiscovered.

The man was near to fainting, or he so pretended. Indeed a pool of blood was gathering beneath his feet ; and whence that blood had come, Chicot knew. He was still waiting until a patrol came by, when he would hand over to the soldiery the intending murderer of his King. But none came : he could no longer hold his gigantic victim, who slipped from his grasp against the protruding wall of a tumbledown house. Chicot had to prop him against it, or they would have both crashed sideways to the ground, with the man this time on top. Chicot could not call him by a name, having no notion who he was, except that he was clearly a discharged soldier. The King's Fool whistled for help. The landlord then showed his face, and a not ungenial face, as promptly as if he had been waiting behind the door. "Two of you, eh?" said he, speaking without thought : which gave the fool much to think of in a hurry.

First, the landlord must help him with his capture, and together they managed to drag the huge creature inside the house. They had scarce laid him on the bench when he fainted in good earnest. The landlord, being short and fat, was now out of breath, but Chicot promptly answered : "Yes, two of us :—he recognized me as an old Leaguer. We were both in the infantry of Mayenne, who never managed to catch the man of Béarn alive or dead. We did the deed to-day, after Mass."

"If that is so, then you should be by now invisible," said the landlord, looked at the unconscious man, cocked his other eye at Chicot, and liked the looks of neither.

"He was told as sure as Heaven that the moment he had struck, he would become invisible. And here he is, very plain to see, and you too, which is even worse. Why were the two of you in it? Why did he trust you? That's not like La Barre. I know the fellow."

"So do I," said Chicot in the hearty tone he commonly assumed when he mocked people with what they would later recognize as truth. "I have known my old friend La Barre longer than you have. Why, at this very moment he is wearing a jerkin of mine that used to fit me when I had a belly as large as his. But I got a tapeworm in my innards and kept on losing flesh, so I gave the jerkin to old La Barre; I could not give him the tapeworm, despite our sworn friendship."

These details reassured the landlord, he accepted them as some sort of evidence. "But why are you both still visible?" he asked, more from curiosity than suspicion.

"Because," said Chicot; "we were only partly successful."

"Then the King is not dead? Praise be to Jesus Christ," blurted out the little landlord; and he plumped down on a bench with a gasp of relief.

"You coward!" cried Chicot, towering over him; "to say so pitiful a thing! You plan an assassination, then cower all day behind bolted doors and curtained windows, telling your beads,"—he pointed to a rosary lying on the table. "And praying that the deed may miscarry and both of us be caught. Isn't that what you prayed for, hey?"—And the fat landlord answered: "I did pray that it might be done, and then that it might not. And now it is half done. And I can only half see you," he groaned. For indeed, apart from the effects of fear, in that genial countenance the eyes were almost engulfed in fat.

"Only half of us is here," said Chicot, with a hint of warning in his still unruffled tones. "If the King dies of the seven wounds we dealt him, I and La Barre will vanish

and be no more seen. You will be left behind, and deservedly, for those plaguey prayers of yours. They'll take you and put you to the question, and they'll sit you on red-hot iron, and I daresay they'll mistake your backside for your face."

Here the landlord fell forward, howling, and roused the unconscious man, who moved his head. Chicot, unluckily for him, did not notice this, and he went on describing to the fat host what happens when a man is quartered; the cracking and the rending of the joints, while with his own eyes he sees his limbs wrenched from him by the straining horses; and certain hairy little devils standing by to seize the gobbets of quivering flesh, and plunge them into brine. All this Chicot recounted to the now frenzied little landlord; but the man on the bench listened and lay motionless.

When the landlord's lamentations subsided in despair, Chicot asked him gravely whether he would like to get his neck out of the noose? That, said the landlord was the only thing he could pray for now: henceforward he would have no more traffic with mortal sin, of which he had much still burdening his soul.

"Well," said Chicot, "I take it that you value yourself more highly than the man on the bench."

"To be sure," said the landlord.

"Then all is well"; observed Chicot; "and the two of us, though of course we stabbed the King no less than he did, may this time save our skins at the expense of our friend La Barre, and his existence on this earth, which indeed has gone on long enough.—Run out and fetch the Watch, we'll give the man up, and bolt."

But the landlord protested mildly that this, as they were placed, would hardly do, though he was not one to boggle at a good deed more or less, and La Barre was a proper gallows bird. "But we are birds of the same feather, and they'll not believe our lies, they'll take us too."

"Oh, I know how to lie," observed Chicot. "I shall explain that I was in the cathedral when the King recanted,

and marked a man I had never seen before. He had the very look of a King's murderer, and he was always fending off the throng from his right side ; from which I guessed that he must have slipped his knife between his trunk-hose and his shirt. When I had worked my way up to him, I could see the outline of the knife : it was an ell long, pointed and edged on both sides, which made his jaw twitch at every touch. So I thought I had better take a hand : I climbed a pillar on to a projecting dragon-head, to which several people were already clinging : my friend was only a little way away, and as the King passed, and my friend was already fumbling in his hose—I leapt, and landed on his neck. He crashed to the floor with a yell, and split his hip. So I saved the King, as may God save him in good time. I caught the murderer, and finding no patrol, I brought him here. Now, gossip, will the judges believe that story ? ”

“ Your lies would take in any man,” agreed the landlord. But when Chicot again bade him run and fetch the soldiers, he scratched his head, and admitted that he did not like the plan. He was in favour of settling the affair then and there, without any intrusion from outside. “ We had much better cut his throat and put him in the brine tub. I’ve a large cask in the shed yonder, plenty large enough ; there’s a mass of salt junk to be had from a man of that size.”

“ I am not of your opinion,” said Chicot, with much gravity. “ My preference is for quartering : a traditional and orderly procedure, whereas the Church, I believe, does not hold with pickling corpses.” He could never resist a gibe at the Church. “ Indeed, I fancy we might suffer more from it than our friend yonder—though his folly certainly merits such an end.”

The pair discussed the question with much earnestness, each standing to his own opinion ; but unlike the Fool, who remained unruffled, the landlord grew highly excited at the notion of wasting so much good salt meat. However, at last he sighed and yielded. “ Very well. You

helped to stab the King, and you know how to lie. I will fetch the soldiers."

No sooner had the landlord gone, than the unconscious man thrust his head backward, so that the mop of flaxen hair dangled over the edge of the bench, and he could peer across at Chicot. "Hey, master," said he feebly.—"Well, friend?" replied Chicot, though he was much startled.

"You have sent the landlord for the soldiers," said La Barre; "now help me out of this. We both stabbed the King."

"What?" cried Chicot, quite dumbfounded. "We stabbed the King?" But La Barre continued:

"I have been asleep and dreaming. Pull the knife out, master. I have lost so much blood, that I can't remember what happened when we stabbed the King."

But, bewildered as he was, he had recognized Chicot from his voice, and the cunning giant would gladly have drawn the King's own Fool into his murderous plot, had there been the slightest prospect of himself escaping the executioner. "I ought to have had you put in brine," Chicot flung at him between his teeth. He fell to pacing round the room, while the other watched him from the corners of his eyes. Knowledge of a crime like this was an enduring peril, unless he promptly discovered the whole matter, and like a true and worthy citizen gave evidence that would bring the criminal to the wheel and gallows. How did his King regard him? As his faithful Fool? Or as a hired assassin? Either alternative was possible, in times like those a man fell readily under suspicion. . . . He must act at once, get this fellow's story out of him, and judge him, if he would himself evade the judgment.

So much resolved, the Fool drew the knife out, the double-edged knife wherewith La Barre had meant to stab the King; but it had split his own hip, and when it was removed, a great gout of blood spurted on to the floor. The giant, unused to pain and blood-baths of this kind, was on the point of fainting once again, but Chicot clouted him on the ears until he recovered himself, then

bound up the wounds with the giant's own shirt, which he dipped in diluted vinegar, propped him up, gave him a cup of wine—and ordered him to tell his story.

"'Tis a long one."—"Make it short."—"The landlord will soon be here with the soldiers."—"He'll be too bemused to come back yet awhile."—"Why?"—"They'll tell him that nothing really happened to the King."—"Did nothing happen to him?" At this point Chicot lost patience.

"Fellow! Here I have your knife. I'll not come near you. You are bandaged, but the wine may have put some blood back in your veins. But from this safe corner I shall throw the knife: at your bare neck—and stab you, as you would have stabbed the King, over the heads of the crowd. For that is how you meant to kill the King."

"You know too much," said La Barre. "I give in: and I'll tell my story."

"Take care and tell no lies! I am a servant of His Majesty, and if your lips lie, I shall hear your vitals shout the truth aloud."

At this, La Barre fell off the bench in such terror that Chicot reflected that he was behaving more like a Fool than a Judge: and he forgot to start questioning his victim until the latter observed, unasked, that his name was Peter Barrière, commonly known as La Barre.

"And by profession a King's murderer. You could not have advanced so far in any other, for the name will be written on the page of history."

"I am no man's murderer," cried La Barre. "It was others made me so. I was a shipman on the Loire and at two and twenty as innocent as on the day I was born at Orléans."

"Who robbed you of that innocence?"

"A recruiting-sergeant bribed me to enlist under the Queen of Navarre, but I, by ill luck, fell in love with one of her women."

"I respect ill luck," observed Chicot gravely. "But first, as touching Madame Marguerite de Valois, whom

you call the Queen of Navarre. She plotted against her husband's person and throne, so she is kept a prisoner in a castle ; but she suborns the like of you, to help her escape and plot against us once again. Against me too, an officer of His Majesty. Since you entered the service of the Lady of Valois, you have really lent yourself . . . to a plot against my person."

"I fancy you are talking like a Fool !" growled La Barre ; and Chicot thought so too. When he talked plain sense, like a nobleman, men laughed, because he was known as the King's Fool. And now, when gravity was called for, he must needs act the buffoon. And he was cursing himself heartily, when La Barre brought him back to the matter in hand.

"It all came from my unlucky passion for the lady, who was utterly taken up by day and night with the gay doings of the Court. If I lay upon her bosom, we always seemed to roll into the pond, or the floor of the hayloft gave way, or ghosts appeared in our room. But it was just the courtiers' playfulness, and the lady took care that I should love in vain."

"A most self-sacrificing fidelity," said Chicot with approval. "Whereupon you of course resolved to kill the King."

"Gently," said the other. "The notion came to me in dreams. The Queen commanded me, while I was asleep, to help her husband, the King of France, into another world : which done, she would leave me in peace with my girl in this one ; she even promised her a dowry."

"Did you merely dream this ? Think—surely the Queen did give you that very order ?" He spoke in deep earnest, all the mockery had faded from his voice. And La Barre answered :

"She did not : I went into her when she was alone, and told her of my purpose. Then the Queen began to weep, turned to the wall, and implored me not to think of such a deed. Soon afterwards, she dismissed me from her service, and I left the castle."

Chicot, whose heart was throbbing, made no reply. How could he report this to the King? The King's own wife had sent the murderer forth, instead of clapping him in her deepest dungeon.

In his agitation he came out of his corner, and fell to pacing back and forth, brandishing the murderer's stiletto. Every time he passed, La Barre recoiled, but he watched Chicot with blinking, glittering eyes. Chicot paid no heed, possessed by the horror he had heard. He had meant to give his evidence like a true and worthy citizen, and now his position was more perilous than ever. Suddenly the fellow made a grab at the knife, and was within an inch of seizing it. Chicot sprang backwards to the door of the dark shed, stretched out an arm and opened it. "Inside with you!" he cried. But the other begged most pitifully not to be shut into the dark abode of the brine barrel. He had still much to confess.

As his judge wavered, La Barre began about a priest at Lyon who had urged him to kill the King, and had also promised that when the deed was done he should become invisible. This same priest had also sent him to a Grand Vicar of the Archbishop, to whom he had disburdened his heart, but received no answer. But no answer may yet convey an answer. All the more so, as a Capucin also had encouraged him in his purpose, and a famous Italian monk had actually given him the same advice. In brief, the intending murderer of the King had confided in so many ecclesiastics that half the clergy in Lyon must have been merely waiting for his attempt. The King's Fool stood open-mouthed: could his master have so many mortal enemies in his faithful city of Lyon? Meantime La Barre, now in full flow, and with an occasional blink at the fateful shed, spoke of his journey to Paris: and Chicot said no more. He knew how cordially the preachers of Paris regarded the King.

The reason for which one notorious priest had approved the murder of the King struck vilely on his ear;—it was urged that the King, whether he went to Mass or no, could

in no case be a Catholic, and the priest would never believe him one. What now? thought the Fool. After recantation they might well have held their hands. They stab at any price.

"But why did you not stab the King before I caught you?" he asked. The answer was that a revulsion had come upon the murderer; he felt himself drawn backwards, by a rope that seemed to be slung round the middle of his body. Chicot sank into a reverie, and indeed he forgot where he was. The silence in the room deepened, until a whispering began, which Chicot did not hear; it gradually grew louder, and the sound was as of someone speaking outside the curtained window. "La Barre, have you got him?"

"No," said La Barre to the window.

"Then we will get him."

"How many are you?"

"Five."

"Why, friends, how do you come to be here?" asked La Barre once more.

"The landlord fetched us instead of the soldiers."

"Wait," said La Barre. "I will speak with the officer, he may give himself and the knife up of his own free will. Well?" he asked the now dumbfounded Chicot, and stepped threateningly towards him. Chicot, realizing that he must keep the knife at all costs—leapt backwards into the shed; another leap; but at the third, he found no floor beneath his feet, and fell.

He expected to be plunged into an abyss where he could neither see nor hear. Nothing of the kind. Chicot promptly emerged, backside upwards, from a heap of muck, but still brandishing his knife. Then he listened. Only one voice reached him, that of the man Barrière, commonly called La Barre, asking him whether all was well. "Come down here," answered Chicot; "you and your five fellows, one at a time, and I'll cut the heads off each of you."

"There's no head here but mine," said the murderer;

"and that I mean to put in a safe place at once. My head, and my loquacious belly. You cozened me into believing that you would get the truth out of my vitals, and I was terrified. Well, it is the voice from my vitals that tipped you into the cesspool. And there you shall stay ; farewell. I'll come up with that wandering landlord somewhere and speak to him seriously about this business of pickling corpses."

La Barre was gone ; first his voice, and then his foot-step. In the pitch darkness, Chicot plunged about in search of some sort of foothold to help him to clamber out. Once back in the room, he sank on to the bench, and lay with head flung back. There was no hurry ; dusk began to fall.

A BATH

King Henri sat in the water so hastily fetched by the lackeys and the maids. It was heated on the furnace, and then poured from kettles into the cavity in the centre of the bath-room. It was a low-roofed, narrow room, with a tiled tank approached by steps, on the last but one of which the King lay naked, soaking in the water, which was kept in motion by his First Chamberlain, Monsieur d'Armagnac, who stirred it with branches, and now and again scattered a shower of drops upon his master's head. For so damp an occupation d'Armagnac had taken off most of his clothes, indeed he was wearing little but an apron about his middle. Henri recited to him a translation of some verses by Martial which they often quoted to each other.

"A slave, girt with an apron of black hide, stands to serve you when you take your bath."

The First Chamberlain countered with the same verses in the Latin : it had always amused him and the King to recall that the poet was not describing a man, but a Roman lady, being massaged in her bath by slaves.

D'Armagnac was usually greeted with a lively jest from his master, but was not much surprised when no jest came that night, for Henri was absorbed in dreams : nay, worse than that, by the looks of him—he seemed sunk in gloomy meditation, or haunted by some dark premonition. D'Armagnac silently dipped his branch and scattered a soft shower over his master's head and chest ; at last, when Henri stretched himself and looked up at the white-washed beams, the First Chamberlain laid his branch on the edge of the bath, and stepped against the wall. The space round the sunken tank was narrow ; in one corner stood an iron tripod carrying some lighted tapers, and on the opposite side, behind the King, his clothes lay on a chair. Their thick gold embroidery held them upright ; the breeches and the doublet sat there like the figure of a headless, neckless man.

Henri thought of those leaping, scorching bonfires, evil and devouring, into which the mob thrust whom they could ; he would be a proper victim. They were ready traitors, there was no relying on their pacts. One Mass was useless. He would always have to conquer men anew, as indeed had always been his fate. By a pillar in the cathedral he had heard words said that put fear into his heart, they were so terrible. What was Chicot doing ? The words were proved true before ever they were uttered. A blinking giant would have gladly made them so. The knife ! That lawyer had said : Now he is ripe. Where could Chicot be ? Not that Chicot could bring much help now. He, Henri, had taken the death leap at last.

He lay full length upon the steps under the rippling water, and sleep came upon him. Monsieur d'Armagnac stood motionless, and watched his old comrade's limbs relax. He reflected that they both were growing old. It was no help to pretend indifference, though that was the way in which a man must face the years. The First Chamberlain, girt with his leather apron, left the bath-room barefooted, carefully locked the door, and stood on guard outside it. From time to time he peered through the

keyhole ; once he laid his ear to it ; the sleeper had said audibly : " Where can Chicot be ? "

But when the man so named did in fact appear at the end of the passage, Monsieur d'Armagnac stood even more squarely in the doorway. He at once felt that there would be trouble were Chicot admitted to the King in his bath. And as that nobleman approached, he thought of yet more reasons for keeping him outside. Monsieur d'Armagnac folded his arms and stiffened, as he used to do when a young man. But Chicot said :

" Fear nothing, Sir. I shall not intrude."

" You may not do so, Sir. You stink like a goat, and you are drunk."

" You are more like a goat, Sir, with your hide apron and your hairy thighs. As touching my odour, I caught it from a loathsome cesspool, into which I was made to jump by a belly-talker. As to my condition, when I got out again, being much shattered by my untoward adventure, I not unnaturally took an excess of wine : I did not feel able to report the matter to His Majesty, unless I were tipsy."

" You shall not enter," repeated Monsieur d'Armagnac, gravely, but merely for form's sake. From the bath-room came the sound of splashing water, the King had awakened. Chicot went on in a flat, metallic voice. He was wholly sober, and had nicely calculated what was suited for the King to hear, what he should suppress, or soften, or suggest.

" Sire ! I should say, if the King could hear me," he cried in a high, clear tone. " Sire ! Your murderer, or the man who meant to be so, was a soldier, who had never had a hand in any evil. It was love that led him astray. He was a lover, and he could not endure to be continually abused by his beloved, to amuse a licentious Court. Which was that Court ? " Chicot himself put the question as no one else did. " The scene of my story is the castle of the illustrious lady known as the Queen of Navarre. A place where anything may happen."

He paused, and drew breath. From within came more

sounds of splashing, as though the bather were tumbling in his bath. But Chicot waited vainly for any protest or command. "Idleness is the root of all evil," he said at last. "Love is the sole pastime in that castle. Behold a poor soldier, who tries to ruffle with the rest. He would kill the King! The illustrious lady of course claps him in her deepest dungeon."

"Hey! I'll have no lies!" came a voice from the bathroom.

"Nay, but she wept,"—said Chicot in a humble and remorseful tone. "She wept bitterly, and dismissed the soldier——"

"And sent me no warning," sighed Henri in his brick tank.

"How could she?" cried Chicot—this was imagination, but he thought the plea was plausible. "Monks, priests and prelates pestered her unmercifully, indeed the poor lady's life was threatened; she was watched and her letters intercepted; she could send no message, though in her own chamber she wept bitterly."

Here a sudden sob burst from Monsieur d'Armagnac. The Queen of Navarre, of whom Chicot had spoken of as of a character in a Romance, was for the First Chamberlain the living comrade of those nights of murder, of the School of Unhappiness now long past, and all the Troubles of Life, which he himself had faced at his master's side for so many, many years. The face that then was hers had glowed with the fire of sense, and yet mirrored the cool radiance of a star; she slipped out of bed and up the steps of a throne; and her name was Margot. She had been worshipped by all—and they were many—who loved human beauty and human understanding—one of them was Armagnac, to whom she had given her incomparable hand. Our Margot, he thought, and he felt the weight of years; and now she hates us unto death. Unmanned by his emotion, he left his post. The rising tears half choked him, and as he strode down the passage in his apron, his breath came and went in shattering gasps.

But in the bath-room all was silent. There sat one who was easily moved to tears, and therefore the less trusted. Why was he not weeping now? Chicot nodded to himself, and strands of tousled hair nodded over his high smooth forehead. He could have peered through the keyhole, but he did not. The man within was alone, unobserved, a naked man at the mercy of a knife; and an incomparable hand, once beloved beyond all others, had not been raised to hold it back. The possessor of that knife was one of those who hopped round bonfires, and with every one of them he had now made his peace. For their sake he had heard a solemn Mass, for them he had dared the leap of death. Be it so. Let the blow fall—so thought he, sitting in his cell.

“Chicot!”

A long while had passed. The man outside no longer listened, he was sunk in dreams. At the sound of his name, he started, and dashed into the bath-room. “Bar the door!” cried the naked King. “How many were concerned in the plot?” he asked softly.

Chicot recounted them exactly, he had no more thought of palliation. His hard Fool’s mind had seen the vision of murder, and he meant to make it plain. There might be a murderers’ den round any corner, like that whence he had come. Now dens of murderers are matters for jest: and the soldier who talked with his belly, and expected to be made invisible when the deed was done, and the landlord too, were comical enough, but there was that in the atmosphere of the room that hardened both men’s faces. Not purposely, but from the habit of his calling, the Fool made a merry tale of his dispute with the landlord as to whether the man should be quartered or put in brine. The ruffian with the gashed hip, the result of an injudicious lust for murder; the belly-talk, the five companions, and the cesspool: a very merry tale, but those two faces grew yet harder. The ruffian had fled, he is powerless, his fate is set. He will have another knife sharpened on both edges, again he will lie in wait for the King,

and he will be taken ; for he is now known. His tale is told.

Chicot had finished and was silent ; and the King was silent too. Suddenly he looked up. "Tell me one thing. La Barre was never near enough to stab me. How would he have done it ? "

Chicot slipped the knife out of his trunk-hose, from the very place where the murderer had hidden it, and flung it—quicker than eye could follow. The King turned his head ; behind him his white silk suit sat in the chair, as though it were himself, headless and neckless ; and where the neck would have been, the knife quivered in the wall, a whole ell of it, in the centre of the neck that was not there. "Well aimed," says Henri. "You deserve a hundred crowns for that throw—if I had them by me at the moment." Naked as he was, he laughed. Once more he looked round at the knife and laughed aloud. Chicot from courtesy twitched his lips, as though to indicate : I am Your Majesty's Fool. Even in jest I am still serious.

Then it came into Henri's mind to say : "By a pillar in the cathedral stood yet another man, who spoke in secret to his neighbour, but I heard. It was my man of law, and what he said was : "Ah, now he is lost. Now he is what he has never been before : ripe for slaughter."

At these words Chicot burst into a trumpet-roar of laughter, for the jest was not his own. Henri laughed too, but not so heartily. To maintain his good humour, he had to keep looking round at the knife, sticking where the neck might have been, but was not.

BOOK FOUR

JOYFUL SERVICE

THE ANOINTING

THE holy oil with which a King of France was anointed and consecrated, was kept in Rheims ; but that city was still in the hands of the League. Moreover the capital was still held by the enemy. Intent as he was on possessing Paris, it was most necessary that he should first be anointed and crowned. Though he himself took small account of this obligation, it was generally held to be all-important ; so search was made for a holy oil. The best that could be found was connected with the tradition of Saint Martin ; this decided Henri. He knew every foot of the kingdom for which he had fought so long, and he knew, having himself ridden against them, the Patron Saint of every place ; and it was most commonly Martin. Good, Martin it shall be : and the great cathedral of Chartres shall take the place of Rheims. No good Catholic could belittle the solemn act, if the scene of it was Chartres cathedral.

Now Henri well remembered that at Saint-Denis, when he recanted and accepted the true faith, there had been general jubilation, and a concourse of people from Paris, with whom he had made his solemn pact : and among them was a murderer. It was doubtless true that the murderer had been there already ; he was scarce to be distinguished from the crowd in which he had been hidden, and which seemed heart and hand devoted to the King. The merest blunder ; men stabbed just as they sang and knelt. Occasions alter, the spirit of men is manifold. The task was to lay hold of good men, as they are called, and confirm them in that goodness. Reasonable beings should never be otherwise than cheerful, self-restrained, and merciful. But a realm must first be established wherein

these virtues may reign. All the more needful were these solemn ceremonies, that helped to tame unruly hearts. If they were often held, thought Henri, his murderers' hearts might be melted even to tears ; though that was uncertain. He could only point the way, and go forward. That was the power of the King, indeed it was power in essence, as he recognized, not for the first time, for thus had his course been laid ; and yet, too, he could not hold so high a motive for his recognition of power until the final issue ; there was too much to do.

The solemn ceremony at Chartres had to be built up anew ; the persons who should have played their part in it, and the emblems that they should have held, all were missing. Crown and sceptre, and all the rest had been in rebel hands, and were now melted down, broken, dismembered, or merely stolen, as seemed most profitable. The dignitaries who should have been summoned by virtue of their office, were either on the enemy's side, or in his power, more especially the bishops. A few lay lords excused themselves, because they distrusted the Royal power. Paris remained Spanish—why these solemn ceremonies ? But there are always loyal servants to be found, and they promptly set to work on what was needed ; such as the two-fingered Hand of Justice on which oaths were sworn, the sword of State, and the woven tapestries, enough of them to cover the walls of a cathedral. All these were made or contrived in haste ; other notables replaced the absent, and a rehearsal was held, to ensure that each of them was familiar with his part ; and on the morning of the ceremony two noblemen rose at three o'clock : the cathedral had to be prepared.

The King had spent the whole of the foregoing day in hearing sermons, explaining the significance of the ceremony ; and in confession and prayer. On the morning of February 21st there escorted him to the ceremony two bishops and several high personages, of whom he in outward aspect was the highest. He wore a garb that seemed to him fantastic ; a voluminous smock of silvered linen, and

beneath it a long shirt of crimson silk. He looked like a figure from another age, but both his ladies—his sister and Gabrielle—insisted he should so appear ; at the instance, in fact, of Dame Sourdis, whose admirer, the Chancellor Cheverny, set great store by due observance. The Chancellor and several other gentlemen of rank followed on foot, among them the Grand Master of the Horse, the Duke of Bellegarde. Henri could distinguish his old friend Feuilemorte by his walk, and would gladly have turned and smiled at him : but the mere thought of his strange attire forbade such familiarity. Once more he stepped into the cathedral, under the eyes of the watching throng, preceded up the stone-flagged nave by heralds, and much visible pomp of power, even a Constable with unsheathed sword ; then came Henri, quite alone, with a solemnity that no one wholly understood, least of all himself :—was it a splendid spectacle, or was it little better than a pantomime ?

The heralds began to cry out names, the old traditional twelve names, as they had once been borne by the great nobles of the kingdom. No Duke of Aquitaine answered, for there had long been none to answer, and indeed had one been there, he would have been wearing an ancient costume from a masque, like Henri. But he heard the worthy Soissons, his sister's lover, make his answer ; and thenceforward each one present answered for one absent. When the Bishop of Chartres, in place of the Archbishop of Rheims, anointed the King with the holy oil, which was not the true oil, the process tickled him, and to stifle a laugh, he coughed. This in the devoutest of attitudes, with forehead bowed ; but at heart he was with the charming Gabrielle, up yonder in her gallery—he fancied, at any rate, that the charming Gabrielle viewed the whole display with the same feelings as himself. . . . She would be thinking of Feuilemorte, and how Henri had thrown him sweetmeats as he lay beneath their bed. . . . And Henri looked more ceremonial than ever.

In the meantime the charming Gabrielle, on her high

gallery in the centre of the nave, had no memories of the sort, nor was she in any such humour. Her dear lord had once more taken all the proffered oaths, and especially that against the heretics. In her deepest soul she would never have believed it. . . . She listened to the acclamations ! They were beginning a Te Deum in his honour, and in that instant she envisaged him as the little old man with the blackened face who came on foot to the castle of Cœuvres, and she had said to him : ‘ Sire, how dreadful you look ! ’ And then trifled with him for a long while, betrayed him sedulously, and would not be his until . . . until he proved his greatness when he held his Court afield. A singular Court it was, that had moved after every turn of war. She had had to hold a balance between pastors and prelates : her aim had been the enrichment of her family. Monsieur d’Estrées was a thief, and she protected him ; without doubt it was her loyalty to her family that alienated Monsieur de Rosny. She had worked for the conversion of her heretic, delicately at first and in secret, as she had been told to do ; but she still had loved the other and almost run away. Not until near the end, in a night of tears and mysterious visions, did she discover whose child she bore beneath her heart, and who in fact was her dear lord. So had it come to pass that the charming Gabrielle sat above the nave, quivering with joy and pride, her eyes dazzled by the very ecstasy of seeing her lord receive the crown.

Strange how a man can be mistaken. Henri was careful not to look up at his lady ; he feared that the desire to laugh would make her cough too. Solemn ceremonies do not gain by repetition, for those who can see below the surface and have an eye for comedy. Henri had exhausted all his gravity in his struggle with his conscience, his arduous meditations, and the effort needed for his death leap. It is done, ask not wherefore. If for power, now that it is at last achieved, there is no illusion in it left. The herald calls the name of a dead man, a live one answers. The bishop, lately mitred, lifted the ampulla,

which was indeed the finest of the regalia on which they had been able to lay hold. Then, upon that doubting head, the crown was lowered ; the crown of France, that should have been a venerable object, but was in fact fresh from the workshop. Such is the spectacle of power. A ray of sunlight flashed upon the sword that Marshal de Matignon held erect before him, which should have been the Constable's sword. In point of fact there was no Constable, and Matignon, who made lewd verses with equal skill in Latin and in the native dialect, was no doubt turning a couplet at the very moment when the sword flashed. So much for power.

In the meantime Henri was thinking of another, whom he carried in his heart ; she who really wielded power over the hearts of men. He disliked this ceremony ; he did not see how it could help to tame unruly hearts. He was here conscious of no murderer's presence—which, by so much, was a great relief ; perhaps, however, this absence of foreboding meant that the anointing and the crowning and the great day's event, made his person invulnerable for a while. The lawyer's bitter phrase had after all been wrong. And, as the peril to his life receded, the King grew grave, he recovered the gravity lost over the antics of a Fool in a squalid tavern, or in a bath-room, when that same Fool came into it. It was not thus he looked at his faithful Rosny.

During the ceremony Henri had more than once turned towards Rosny, and was startled by what he saw ; here was the one man who was sincere. He might have been a figure from the portal of the cathedral ; there too he could have held his own as a broad-faced, sculptured image, forever imperturbable. A Protestant, he listened to the King pledging himself to destroy the heretics, his face remained unmoved. He stood up and played his part though his inner voice told him that the whole thing was buffoonery. That was the expression, for himself alone, of the harsh Huguenot austerity, of his own opinion of that solemn ceremony. But the astute Rosny

bade that disturbing voice be silent ; and his outward attitude and mien was that of a true and faithful servant of his King. Henri, who was a good judge of men, knew his Rosny ; and here, amid all this solemn ceremony, he became certain that Rosny was his man for ever.

Not long afterwards he summoned him to his Council. In due time, and at his own instance, he was created Duke of Sully, and became all-powerful in the finances of the kingdom, and Grand Master of an Artillery the like of which had never before been seen ; in act and deed the King's right hand—so long as his great King was there, and not a minute longer. To Henri he had pledged himself, and become his man, regardless of an old Huguenot's inner voice. They were to play into each other's hands. Here then, while the solemn ceremonies proceeded, was born a great career, as Henri turned and turned again to look at the Baron, and was more than once startled by what he saw. For he was looking in the face of duty and stone gravity, despite that secret voice that said—Buffoonery. A man of the middle sort, reflected Henri, not to say a middling man. But an admirable example for a King ! So Henri thought, for simplicity then seemed to him greatly to be desired. But very hard to come by, save for the Rosnys of this world.

The King left the cathedral more royally than he had come. His gait and carriage had acquired dignity ; and he wore his fantastic raiment with conviction. Such a central figure lent impressiveness to the pomp of a procession, which had hitherto seemed haphazard by comparison. The mob fell silent as it passed, and knelt. Henri did indeed change his clothes before sitting down to table—and waved d'Armagnac aside when he proffered the white silk suit ; he wanted to be comfortable, in everyday garb. In the banqueting hall he sat beneath a canopy, which in no way affected his appetite ; alone at his own table, overlooking on his right the table of the lay lords, all busily engaged in filling their bellies ; in doing which they were following their King's example. They, after his recantation

were to be otherwise his peers, though he indeed would be the first among them, and together they were France. That was not his view ; he thought it presumptuous, and, moreover, rather less than true. He had the doors again opened and let the people in. He feared no throng, only the nobles were offended.

But good humour was soon restored. He told the noblemen who were serving him, that Don Philip, the Ruler of the World, had caught the dread disease. There was much amazement at His Catholic Majesty, and his strange aberration after such long abstinence. Such a penalty for a single sin ! What if every amorous King was visited by so prompt a judgment ! Whereupon all of them, to left and right, swung round abruptly towards the table standing crossways to their own, and stared at the King beneath his canopy. The King laughed, so they could all laugh too. Their laughter was at the King of Spain and his ludicrous fatality. Many of them took the story for a jest, a trifle venturesome indeed : these laughed the longest. There were some great lords, these mostly clergy, whose eyes were moist with merriment, and they clapped their lifted hands towards the King, in token of approval. How much more often than he of Spain had their King challenged the disease, and never caught it yet. Nay more : his enemy was now infected. So much luck deserved applause.

Some grew meditative, and their laughter was stilled. A man so lucky was to be feared. A double game at his expense might come to evil issue ; and so far as any of the guests still maintained relations with the Spaniards in Paris, now was the time to break them off. The Spaniards would not stay in Paris when their sovereign was laid low. Luck had given the signal, let it not pass unheeded. Someone said aloud that not only the Ruler of the World, but his Empire too had caught the disease, for it was rotting and dropping off him, limb by limb. This was repeated all down the table and canvassed with much vivacity. Meantime faces had grown flushed with wine and food, and

voices rose. This masculine banquet had, as a consequence of the news from Spain, assumed the aspect of a carouse, and the King wanted to bring it to an end. Any observant guest could see as much, and such a one was Cardinal du Perron, who had slipped the cushion under Henri's knees when he recanted.

Du Perron handed the King his fingerbowl, bowed, and asked leave to sing a song, which was unwonted for a Prince of the Church, and the company fell silent to listen. The Cardinal sang into the King's ear : a brief and tender little ditty, that brought the tears to Henri's eyes. At the upper ends of the two tables only these few words were heard : " Lips of coral, teeth of ivory. Alluring dimpled chin ! " At sight of the King's tears, first the guests nearby and then those further off, realized to whom the song referred. One after the other they rose, until all were standing, paying silent homage to their King's good luck : a while ago they had merely clapped applause.

The image of his luck was called Gabrielle : of this they were mostly aware, for the banquet had stirred the wits of even the dullards. Others compared the treasure that was his, with the uneasy news from Spain. The thoughts of some few went deeper, they noted this transformation in one so unstable, and they saw in this fidelity the resolve to be settled and to possess. And he was destined to great possessions in this world. Valiant he was to the verge of greatness. And that valiance lacked only possession to be greatness indeed. So at least thought all men of sense : and the man of most sense, Monsieur de Rosny, of course conceived greatness as bound up with possession. Hence he here and now decided, against his own instinct and intent, to make his peace with Madame de Liancourt.

The banquet was now over, but in the evening there was another yet to face ; the banquet with the ladies. Some went away to sleep off the interval, or diverted themselves with talk. Henri played ball, with long heavy leathern balls, mighty hard to throw after a heavy feast, and where they struck they left at least a bruise behind.

A hit on a full belly sent the victim staggering, one of the gentlemen was soon prostrate on the grass, and others fell out exhausted. But Henri had not had enough, and as his noblemen failed him, he shouted to some burghers standing by. Which of them was the best at ball-play, he asked, and to their amazement, he named the very men after a single glance. Those chosen were a butcher, a cooper, two bakers, and a juggler, who had unwittingly strayed among his betters : but he was a good deal regarded for his prowess at ball-play. Decent citizens were not commonly disposed to mix with rope-dancers, jugglers, and gallows-birds. But a game makes all men equal, and for the moment the juggler's professional training set him on a level with the rest.

The King, hurling the great balls, first flung one of the bakers out of the game. For near an hour the others endured, until suddenly butcher, cooper, and second baker succumbed ; all three turned and hobbled away. "Now !" cried the King to the juggler—and thenceforward they pelted each other with the great balls, which seemed to hurtle back and forward with almost magical speed and lightness. The players darted from place to place like quicksilver, stretched out a hand and the balls flew into it unbidden, not one, but three and four and five, as airily as soap-bubbles. It was indeed a marvellous display. A throng of people crowded round them, lords temporal and spiritual forgot their digestions, and all stood watching the exploits of King and juggler.

But this amazing display could not be kept up indefinitely, as soon appeared. Reality may not be confused with art. Both players began to sweat ; and as the sweat ran into their eyes and nearly made them miss, each at the same moment slipped off his doublet—on a February day towards evening, and they stood in their shirt-sleeves, the King and his opponent. But something more was plain to view. The juggler was wearing a stout shirt, but the King's was split all down the back. It was old and thread-bare, and unequal to all this violent exercise.

Henri was at first puzzled by the whispering and muttering all round him. He heard murmurs, and now and then a sigh, but at last someone dared to say: "Sire, your shirt is torn." When the words were once uttered, the feeling of pained surprise at once turned into merriment. At first the King himself laughed, though he was also near to flying into a rage. "Armagnac!" he shouted; and when the First Chamberlain appeared—"I thought I had six shirts?" asked Henri. "There are but three left," replied Armagnac.

"So I am allowed to go about with my back bare. Such is the fate of a King, when he ransoms his cities from the League Governors, who have drained them dry, and then remits their taxes. All the broad lands I conquer I give as free gifts to my peasantry. There's enough for my regalia, but not to buy a shirt."

Then he went,—and at the right moment, for the tones of his voice rang in the ears of all the bystanders. It was bravely and nobly spoken. The split shirt had become an oblation to the kingdom, an added radiance to the Royal glory. Here was a King indeed. All saw him in their inner vision once more striding through the cathedral, in the fantastic raiment that he wore so regally—and they thought the departing figure in the torn shirt more impressive still.

Henri dressed in his best for the banquet with the ladies, the giver of the feast being his own dear lady Gabrielle. The great hall of the Archbishop's palace at Chartres, lit up by a myriad tapers, glowed with every sheen of gold. Clusters of tapers in glittering candelabra, backed by wall-mirrors or set upon the table, flooded the brilliant throng with a light that flattered and lent distinction to them all. Of the women, there were none but beauties at that table, and men whose years were not a few, seemed to have recovered the fresh cheeks and unwrinkled brows of youth. In the gathered glow of all those tapers they looked truly noble and magnificent; indeed they scarce recognized each other, in that rich illumination. All

the glory and the gold was centred at the table ; beyond it, the forms of things dissolved, and the rest of the room darkened into a dim haze that hovered beneath the ceiling like cloud vapour in the faint moonlight.

The King and Madame de Liancourt sat facing each other, as master and mistress of the house. On either side of Gabrielle were placed a line of noblemen. Henri had on his left, Madame Catherine de Bourbon, his beloved sister ; next to her, the Princesses and Duchesses of Conti, Nemours, Rohan and Retz. On his immediate right, the Princess of Condé, a kinswoman of his House ; and next to her the Ladies of Nivernois and Nevers. He repeated these names silently to himself, for they were the great names of his kingdom, and the bearers of them had come as though their presence were a matter of course : but he knew what it had cost to get them there. Several of their husbands still sided with his enemies, if only for appearance sake, and held some sort of command in Paris, while the wives sat at table with the King. Such company was not brought together without preliminary manœuvres, more intricate than the most elaborate banquet. This lovely scene marked the end of much sweat, much darkness and much blood. Would indeed that it might truly be the end !

Such were Henri's thoughts as he observed the ladies on either side, each one of whom he loved, and more so than either had any notion. A glance passed from time to time between him and Liancourt : sometimes it said : Well, we have got so far. Sometimes it hinted : Things might have turned out otherwise. To him and to her the meaning of it was : I thank you ; and I love you.

Henri thought his Gabrielle more beautiful than ever, as he looked at her with pride and with a stirring at the heart. The splendour of her attire was indeed something like a challenge ; the ladies could scarcely take their eyes off her. Such gorgeous velvet, of a colour beyond naming, but rich with all the tints of old gold, and autumn foliage, and spring sunshine ; and her arms ringed with heavy

bangles in the Spanish fashion. Never had a dress so perfectly matched both daylight and candlelight. And the hoop of diamonds on that golden head, so delicately poised on the crimped ruff, shone with all the more glory on the tresses that rippled from beneath it in a dazzlement of splendour. True it was that this admiration was reluctant; the picture was a lovely one, but their hearts were hostile, and they were not far from wishing that this sun might set.

And yet—they could not but be touched as they looked at Gabrielle. Her condition was written on her face that very day in a look that stirred others, beside her lord, to affection and anxiety. So pale, so drawn, scarce a trace of that dimpled chin, of which the poet sang, or of that transparent, pearl-like skin. The eyes alone were larger, and the piteous glow of fever in them moved those on-lookers to forget and forgive the milky whiteness of that bosom, and the pendant of beaten gold set with rubies and pearls. The noblemen each side of her were gentle-spoken, but the ladies who leaned across the table and said a heartening word to the expectant mother, were more truly sympathetic. Madame Catherine, the King's sister, watched for the moment when the hostess had to give an order, and beckoned for the dishes and the goblets in her stead. One of her more distant neighbours—Monsieur de Rosny, leapt from his chair, and hastened, before the lackeys could arrive, to pick up a spoon that had fallen from Gabrielle's quavering hand.

As the feast had become thus transformed from a banquet for the crowned King into an offering of homage to his lady—Henri put aside his meditations, and announced to the company that he meant to approach the Pope regarding the dissolution of his marriage, in the intention of marrying Madame de Liancourt. His own tribunal could divorce her from a husband who, as he himself admitted, had been incapacitated by a kick from a horse. The laugh that greeted this, he took for general approval—and he went on to say that his dear lady would soon bear the rank

and title of Marquise. Not yet content, he raised his glass to the Marquise, and looked at her so long and earnestly, with such wide eyes and lifted brows, that everyone realized that she would in time mount higher still. The exaltation of the lovely Gabrielle was not to end until she graced the throne of France at his side. She was to be Queen.

But the general approval did not last. Indeed he only assumed it while flushed with joy and tenderness. Every one of that company had a clear vision of what a Queen of France should be ; not a lady of that land, none of them must have known her, nor ever have had to give her pride of place—a matter that by no means touched the ladies only. From that moment Monsieur de Rosny bore his part in that *deep-rooted antagonism that Gabrielle* had to face from everyone, so long as she lived and could influence the King. Meantime, and in this place, Gabrielle was spared their enmity. She would not live for ever, perhaps she would not live through childbirth, she certainly looked none too well—and so there was a feeling in her favour. Best of all, they knew the King and his promises of marriage. If he had kept them hoodwinked, as he had done until that day, then indeed there would have been matter for concern. But once spoken, already broken. Enough ; the lovely d'Estrées was in none too good a case, from any point of view.

So Gabrielle was treated with every mark of sympathy and respect, when, following the King's example, the company rose from table. Henri led the Princesses of Bourbon and Condé up to her ; and the ladies embraced and kissed. There was not one of them who, when face to face with Gabrielle, would not have told her that she was more ravishing than ever. And sincerely too ; they felt neither hostility nor envy, only a kinship with a woman in her condition ; and therewithal the kinship of humanity, for at that assemblage in her honour there was present, in some sort, an unseen guest, on whose account they thrilled with fear. And who would not applaud a beauty

that seemed as changeless as a work of art ! Before a beauty that may well be in league with death, all heads are bowed.

The doors that led to the staircase were then opened. Some noblemen took the candelabra from the lackeys, and each took his stand upon one stair. Before the King and his lady walked the Princesses of the Royal House, and after an interval, the other gentlemen and ladies. In the centre of the vestibule Henri led his Gabrielle by her lifted hand, lights were raised on high, and they ascended. A very solemn ceremony, thought Henri, who was feeling young and lucky. The ceremony was interrupted by an incident, which did indeed but heighten its effect. Gabrielle was overcome by faintness, the King had to lay an arm about her and help her to the top. The others remained below ; the ascending pair soon passed out of the candle-light into a dim glow, like a moonlit haze of cloud, and vanished as though utterly dissolved.

THE MASKED LADY

Paris was ripe and overripe to receive the King. Not even the Duke of Feria, who still commanded in the city on behalf of His Catholic Majesty, could believe that a Spanish party yet existed. Almost the only obstacles were the defiance of a few irreconcilables, and the fears of a larger number who could not hope for pardon. The leaders of the League, including Mayenne, had removed themselves and their property into safety against all events. Not one of the sixteen prefects of the city wards had failed to assure the King of his secret loyalty ; the tailor had been but the first, when the King's enemies hanged his highest magistrates. The mob were sick of horrors. Priests who preached of them were no longer popular, indeed they went in peril of their lives. The populace were now all for forbearance and understanding—though indeed rather inclined to violence by way of establishing their goodwill. Hence many riots, that were indeed put down,

but mostly to save the face of government. There is no ruler in extremity, that would abdicate and flee, so long as he had weapons to his hand—even if only the weapons, and scarce the arms to wield them. The Spanish commander disposed of more than four thousand foreign troops, who could hold the walls and gates at least.

The King could not simply march into the city. He could deal with those four thousand—but he had to think of his own people, awaiting their gracious King. He had let them fetch provisions from without, that they might eat; how therefore could he now bombard their houses and ravage the capital into submission? Of course he could not. He had to act up to reputation as a popular monarch, and it was only as such that he could seize power. Henri spent several weeks deliberately encouraging people's notion of him as a man like other men. *Nihil est tam popolare quam bonitas*. He would stray about the countryside while hunting, which provided useful opportunities. At two o'clock one morning he stopped quite alone before a house—not, indeed a robber's den, though it belonged to one of his Treasury officials, as indeed he was well aware; there was little in his kingdom that he did not know. The girl who opened the door did not recognize him; he told her who he was, ate a little butter, refused a bed, lay down on the hearth, and on awakening next morning he asked to hear Mass; the priest had to be fetched from three miles away. Could a King be so homely, and a converted heretic so good a Catholic!

Many distrusted him, as for instance a pig-dealer, with whom he sat down at table,—again he had lost his way. The company in the rustic tavern did not observe him, or perhaps pretended to be dullards; when a King practises guile, the peasant is more cunning still. However, the pig-dealer, in seeming ignorance that he was addressing the King, spoke his mind in no measured terms. Henri could only carry off the affair in the grand manner. He looked out of the window as some of his gentlemen trotted up and stopped; they had no doubt been in search of

their lost master. "Think of that now!" said the villagers; He soon had their hearts: clapped the pig-dealer on the back, gave him a good answer, and the man heard no more of the affair. And those same villagers said afterwards that the citizens of Paris could not know the King, or they would open their gates. There's no contending against such agile wits.

It was a masked lady in particular who was taught a lesson in this regard by Henri. She had come expressly from Paris to Saint-Denis, where he then held his Court once more; and she reported for his private ear the condition of his cause in Paris: but in so low a tone that the listeners at the open door could not catch one word. Beside the King's own people, there were certain visitors from Paris, who had arrived that day as though by chance. Not one person in the adjoining room was wholly deceived by that masked lady. Who could she be? A burgher's wife, friendly to the Royal cause? How much could she know? Moreover, would the King, who fears the knife, interview a veiled visitor in private? Most improbable, surely. Then the King's voice spoke, and in a voice that was certainly meant to carry, if possible as far as Paris, he told the masked lady she had better inform her good friends inside that he lay there with an army, and had no notion of withdrawing until he had entered the city, though not by force. Let them place no faith in the Duke of Mayenne. Their lawful King alone was a man of peace, and he was willing to pay for peace with his capital. He reminded the masked lady that all the other cities which opened their gates to him, had prospered. For ten years his citizens of Paris should pay no taxes—indeed he would ennoble all the city corporations; the friends of his cause should live happily ever after. "Those who have betrayed me, God alone shall judge."

All this he announced to the masked lady, as though he were addressing, not her alone, but a whole people whom he refused to mistrust, whether or no they showed him their true faces. Then he dismissed her, still masked.

Swathed in a voluminous cloak she passed the door and through the waiting gentlemen. They followed her to her carriage. Two of them stood aside, kept their eyes off the carriage, and understood each other without a single look. One was Agrippa d'Aubigné, the other a certain Monsieur de Saint-Luc, in the King's service.

In the meanwhile a dusty horseman galloped up, just in time to see the departure of the masked lady, to whom the King had thus spoken his mind. The man in the leather doublet clearly thought he deserved the same confidence. He marched into the house unannounced ; in the centre of the empty room stood the King, no figure now of pride nor arrogance ; he was staring at the floor, and he did not raise his head until he heard the tramp of heavy boots.

"Pastor Damours !" said he. "I might have expected you, at such a moment."

"Sire, a wish of your heart shall be fulfilled. A harsh voice from days long past now speaks to you."

"'Tis the right moment," said Henri.

"Certainly, Sire ; a masked personage has just hurried from your presence. You alone saw your visitor unmasked, and alone know whether it was the Devil."

"I have no dealings with the Devil. I would rather die—or lose all my power."

The pastor as he stood clapped his hands on his two thighs. "Power ! You recanted for the sake of power ; death is no great matter now. For power you are playing an elaborate comedy. People talk of your devices, and laugh :—I would not have them speak and laugh so about me."

"Have I had no success, Pastor ?"

"You have indeed. You know how to catch your fellow-men. I would not care to angle for whiting thus."

He slapped his chest, took off his hat, which he had not done until then, and sang—just as in old days before battle,

Let God, the God of battle, rise
And scatter his presumptuous foes,
Let shameful rout their hosts surprise,
Who spitefully their power oppose.

His voice rang through the hall. Damours raised his right arm, and took one step forward. Once more into battle, the veteran Huguenots in the van, the dead marching at their side, all chanting in unison ; and the psalm, the psalm for the hour of destiny, that struck terror into the enemy and shook his ranks. Victory for the champions of conscience !

As smoke in tempest's rage is lost,
Or wax into the furnace cast,
So let their sacrilegious host
Before the wrathful presence waste.

His voice rang through the hall. The King waved a hand, and it died away. The pastor lowered his arm, and his chin also sank upon his chest. He had forgotten where he was. Henri too forgot that hour, and both of them fell silent, absorbed in their inward vision of days dead and done, days when consciences were clear.

Then Henri took the man's hand and spoke : " Your hair and beard have whitened, and you see mine. Your face is as hard as ever, and it is also marked with sorrow. I now show my face to you as it really is. Is it a cheerful face ? Well, I confess that the seizure of power is at times a game I like to play." He paused, and said once more : " A game it is,"—and went on more rapidly : " Well, and why not ? It is the way to seize power in such a world as this."

" And you are the man to do it," said the old man.

" To every man his allotted task," replied Henri mildly. " I have for that reason listened to you, Pastor Damours."

" You must listen to the anger of the Lord," said the old man vehemently, and the veins in his temples swelled.

" I must indeed,"—said Henri, as mildly as before ;

but it was high time for the other to change his tone. He did so, and the throbbing in his temples ceased.

"Your Majesty must forgive poor Gabriel Damours for entering your presence in this fashion."

Henri opened his arms : "Now you are yourself again : Gabriel Damours as I would have him, the fear of God before his eyes, his heart unshaken in his loyalty."

He opened his arms and waited. Here was the moment for all his Protestants. Away with all these slanders—it must and should be true. Kings suffered more than they gained by living in an atmosphere of mistrust. If only old friends might think so, when they had been betrayed and their privileges had gone. But no one leapt into those outstretched arms. Henri let them fall, and added :

"Pastor, what I must do, is done for your sake too. You shall receive your rights when I am in power."

"Sire ; forgive poor Gabriel Damours : but he does not believe you."

Henri sighed ; "Then," he went on in a pleading voice : "let me tell you a merry tale of the masked lady. It is quite true, for I can take no credit for it."

But the Pastor had already backed towards the door. "What do you want ?" cried Henri. "Am I to lay my capital in ruins ? Am I to convert my people by force to the Religion ? Am I to fight and kill like a savage all the days of my life ?"

"Sire, pray let poor Gabriel Damours go." His voice no longer rang with reproach, nor thrilled with the Divine anger. By no means : he who stood yonder by the door, with half the room between himself and the King, seemed to have dwindled, and not solely because he was so far away ; the fire within him had died down.

"I would make my confession to you, Gabriel Damours," said the King across the intervening space.

"Sire ! Tell the truth to your conscience, not to me." Hard words, but feebly spoken. Henri only understood because he really said as much himself. He turned his face away. When he looked up, he was alone.

Then he took his stand facing the wall, and forced himself to confront the truth that this had been his farewell to his Protestants. No last farewell, he would show them what his purpose was, and that he had not changed. But none believed him—none : neither Damours, nor any of the rest. And Henri told himself to beware of traitors ; none were likelier than his old friends. With his eyes on the wall, he went over in his mind all who might prove treacherous. Strange that the image of Mornay appeared, and yet he was sure of Mornay. That pattern of virtue would surely continue to serve him in perfect uprightness and duty. But he knew he must not ask Mornay to approve his seizure of power, nor to be one tittle less virtuous for his sake. Which irked the King ; he was at ease with treachery and traitors in those days, and lived in such an atmosphere. He banished the vision of Mornay's Socratic head, and summoned up another.

Not one single friend : he was alone in this satiric business of seizing power. Satellites he had and boon-companions. Masked ladies brought to audience—it was well, indeed, that the Pastor did not ask who the mask was ; that ruse should remain forever unrevealed. Who would have thought that she was own daughter to the Governor of Paris, and he in secret treaty with her father. Well, whatever might become of other men, Henri had always thought him honest. Henri disliked Mornay's virtue, and he disliked Brissac's treachery no less. His predecessor had already been suspected of dealings with Henri. Mayenne removed him, and appointed Count Brissac, solely for his simplicity of mind. If that man were simple, then Henri felt that he was no deeper nor more secret than a little child. In truth the man was urging him to take his capital by guile ; a most unpleasant fellow.

All this passed through Henri's mind, as he stood glaring at the wall—though it had been his habit to meditate while striding up and down with a wind upon his brow. A tap at the door brought him to himself again. Two cheerful visitors appeared ; not to be encountered

in any other mood. The first, his worthy Agrippa, was clearly brimming with news, and scarce able to contain it. Young Monsieur de Saint-Luc could wait, the complacency written on his face was a warrant that he would not object. He made much of outward form, and the deference to the King with which he stood aside for Monsieur d'Aubigné was a model of grace and decorum.

"We are late," said Agrippa; "because we had to send all those listeners about their business; they would have served no purpose after the masked lady had gone."

"They would have been unwelcome," said Henri. "Since she went, I had another visitor—it was a brief and excellent scene, but not fitted for the eyes of third persons."

Agrippa asked no question about that. "Sire, you cannot guess who the mask was."

"You had pledged yourself that she was harmless. I am not curious."

"What if someone told you, Sire, I had been in Paris?"

"You? Impossible."

"As I stand here. Indeed I was disguised as an old peasant woman, and passed the gate on a cabbage cart."

"Amazing! And did you see the Governor?"

"He bought my onions in the market,—Brissac, his very self. And we thereby agreed that for the greater security of the Royal person and cause, Madame de Saint-Luc, the Governor's own daughter, should come and receive your commands. Is that a surprise?"

"I am quite dumbfounded," said Henri, to whom Brissac himself had announced Madame de Saint-Luc's arrival. Every man must have a secret from his neighbour. He esteems his part the more for being complicated. *Totus mundus exercet histrionem*, why not Henri too? The capture of Paris would not have amused Agrippa but for his disguise as a peasant crone. The tribulations of poor Gabriel Damours—these histrionics quite put them from his head; besides, who could tell what part poor

Damours himself had had in mind. His had been a truly Biblical appearance.

All of which by the way. These reflections did not prevent Henri from questioning his old friend, and that in so ingenuous a fashion, that the young gentleman behind Agrippa bit his lip to keep himself from laughing. But he did so, more with the intent that the King should clearly realize—first, that Monsieur de Saint-Luc was far superior to the man of the older generation, but also that he was at one with the King in the amiable purpose of sparing his feelings. Henri disliked the man's air, and was moved to say: "Madame de Saint-Luc was excellently disguised—you would not have known her yourself?"

If the King had expected that the young gentleman would attempt some sly retort, he was grievously mistaken.

"Excellently, Sire," agreed Saint-Luc. "I did not recognize her."

"You are lying," said Henri; "to outdo us"—this with a glance at Agrippa—"were it only in discretion."

"Sire, you are a moralist."

"To-day I am," said Henri. "I would therefore know why Monsieur de Brissac plays traitor. You doubtless know your father-in-law from more sides than I; he must have others. At the last Court he seemed a simple sort of person who collected pictures. I was in alliance with the late King my predecessor. Brissac could have thrown in his lot with me, but was quite capable of making his own choice. Why go over to the Spaniards, if he was to dupe them in the end and betray their cause to me?"

"Your Majesty honours me extremely in acquainting me with what, if turned to wrong account, might greatly hurt your cause." *

Here was a sane and honest answer, which put Henri in a more accommodating mood. "Brissac," he remarked; "cannot now go back. He is too deeply committed to me." Then he looked the young man in the eyes and awaited his explanations. The other cleared

his throat, looked vaguely about him, and admitted that it was but a chair he needed. "If I am to think, I must sit down."

"I walk about on such occasions. But since it is you that must do the thinking, let us sit," said Henri.

Agrippa too drew up a chair, in much astonishment at all this sudden gravity. Brissac? A most unsoldierly fellow—he pictured his silly air of mystery as he bought vegetables from the disguised peasant woman, haggled, departed and came back, and let fall a whispered word or two each time. It was all a matter for laughter, if indeed it were worth mentioning at all.

"Monsieur de Brissac is a serious case for every moralist," observed young Saint-Luc, with the gravest self-complacency, now that he felt himself on firmer ground. "When he opened the matter of my marriage to his daughter, he led the girl into the room—masked, just as she appeared in your presence. However, I realized that it was not his daughter but someone else. He believes that no one has really any eyes except a connoisseur of pictures like himself."

"Indeed a serious case," said Henri.

"He has studied many pictures, not to mention books."

"He is a slovenly-looking fellow," observed Agrippa.

"More than that." Saint-Luc made a kind of rending movement with his hands; and, as he did so, it was noted that he was still wearing his left glove.

"Monsieur de Brissac collects beautiful things, not simply to hang them on the wall, or put them away on shelves; he soaks his mind in images and inspirations. He is what he reads and sees."

"Until there is nothing of his own left," said Henri, who now understood. Saint-Luc went further:

"He does not play traitor. He is a traitor, because much practice, and the most assiduous art have made him so."

"Does he call himself a Humanist too?" asked Agrippa d'Aubigné, leaping from his chair. "We were, and we

were men as well. I composed verses as I rode and fought. I had heavenly visions when I stood barefooted, throwing up trenches like an earthworm for the valiant Humanist I served."

"That," said Henri, addressing vacancy; "is the proper way. The other may be more diversified; but it shakes a man's character, and leaves him without a face." Then turning to Saint-Luc with a short laugh. "'Tis a good device of Count Brissac to collect pictures and read the classics, since they induce him to surrender my capital and provide me with entertainment too. Does not Feria suspect?"

"How should he? Monsieur de Brissac himself proposed to the Duke of Feria that several gates should be blocked, that the outer walls might be more easily defended. Feria is no soldier; he does not realize that the guards will be withdrawn from the blocked gates, and Your Majesty will force your way in through them: you will understand that they will only be filled with earth."

"That will be discovered before the day."

"No: my astute father-in-law has suborned the Warden of the Merchant Guilds, the petty magistrates, and half the city. Indeed, people ask who is not involved, excepting Feria; he congratulates himself on his Governor's simplicity."

"No doubt that everyone knows what he means to make out of this business."

"Monsieur de Brissac expects that Your Majesty will be so gracious as to promote him Marshal of France."

"Does he indeed!" said Henri, but his expression did not change. He repeated the words, as the horrid comedy took possession of his mind. He had been a fighter all his life. He had wielded his own sword, by the strength that was his he had endured—all his life. He had fought all his life for his conscience and the kingdom; and the whole struggle would have been futile but for this amateur of pictures, this vapid traitor. The irony of it all came full upon the King, but he mastered himself, though the

blood surged into his face. The laughter that was near his lips would have been too horrible.

He rose and walked to the window. Saint-Luc waited a minute before he tiptoed after him ; he understood the impulses of the human soul. Then he took the freedom to speak ; but to stress his deference, he spoke with a sort of mincing stammer. The King did indeed despise him, but he did not like to think that that was the intention. Without turning his head he repeated what had come to his ears :

"The good man is having a baldric embroidered, so I hear. The Archangel Gabriel, very neat and ingenious, worked upon white silk. My Marshal proposes to present it to me on the day of my entrance—who can tell why," he concluded, thinking of the unlikelihood of such a performance.

"To-day is the fourteenth of the month. It will be in a week," lisped Monsieur de Saint-Luc. At these words, Henri swung round :

"You know more than you should, unless you had seen the Governor. Were you in Paris in disguise ?"

"By no means. But all the details of the plot are here at Your Majesty's disposal." So saying, the young gentleman drew a paper out of his glove, the left one, which he had kept on. Henri snatched it from him. "Who gave you this ?"

"Brissac himself."

"Then he is here."

"He was here—and by permission of the Duke of Feria. He came with two notaries, to transact some urgent family business with me. I left them as soon as I had the paper." This he said without his previous diffidence, nor was there even a tremor of exultation in his tone. A very knowing young man ; no need to linger with him now.

"My horse !" shouted Henri from the window.

"Sire ! You will never catch him now."

In a flash Henri was outside, in the saddle, and galloping towards Paris. He soon came in sight of a huge jolting

coach, that filled the whole roadway. He could but ride round through the wood and stop between two trees until it came rumbling towards him. Through the window in the front Henri could see the notaries ; three of them. Clad in black with pointed hats, all alike, wizened and old, and so wearied by the efforts of the journey that not one of them seemed likely to notice a horseman by the wayside. Indeed, their eyes were closed, their mouths were open, which made them look even more of a pattern than ever. Henri was on the point of shouting out, but did not, and the great spectral coach had nearly lumbered past him, when, at the last moment, one of the three notaries raised a hand :—the hollowed hand moved slowly, very slowly, forward, towards the nose of him who sat dozing opposite ; *Ptt !* he had that fly. And oh the joy on that wizened, homely countenance !

A fly caught on an unsuspecting nose ; while the King, to whom the catcher of that fly was to yield up his capital, looked on. Now Henri knew enough, and for just that reason he let the coach rumble onwards. He began to wonder seriously whether the man were in his right mind.

What trouble such people took to be so crazily crooked : so he reflected, as he rode back at a walk. Well, he carried in his memory no little sense very painfully collected on his way through life, beginning with the night of Saint Bartholomew. It was his task to make all this impossible ; indeed it was the business of a King. . . . They would go on, they would make it hard for him. *Pah !* Conceive of catching flies as a sign of recognition, and sending a masked lady as an emissary ! Well, he must play his part.

THE SEIZURE OF POWER

All came about as arranged. Brissac was a model of circumspection. He told the Spaniards to rely on him and keep quite quiet, so that the traitors should not suspect. For there were traitors in the city, and they might easily

discover Brissac's purpose to arrest them all. And so the haughty Spaniards, from mere belittlement of danger, let destiny move on.

Henri played admirably into the hands of his coadjutor. He might indeed have taken him prisoner by mistake. About four o'clock on the morning of the twenty-second, Brissac nearly fainted because there was no sign of the Royal forces. But this was merely owing to a thick fog, and as soon as Brissac left the outer walls, he too was engulfed in it. Fortunately his son-in-law, Monsieur de Saint-Luc, was in command at that point, so there was no mishap.

The two blocked gates were cleared, and the morning bells began to peal just when the King entered his capital. His noblemen could wait no longer : in full armour they leapt the final barricades. He himself walked with hand on hip, head a little to one side, and all the air of coming home after a few hours' hunting. He had been away for eighteen years.

The first face that met his eyes was the angel face of Brissac. Such purity of feature and of heart is rare, and the faces of mortal men are not commonly so marked. Kneeling on the muddy ground, his blue eyes upturned, Brissac proffered to the King a white baldric. The King promptly girt his own about Brissac's shoulders, embraced him, and hailed him " Marshal ".

By way of gratitude, Brissac advised the King to put on his armour. It was indeed agreeable to go about among the populace in a plain doublet, as His Majesty of course wished to do : but one never knew. Henri started : the knife !—he had forgotten it. No ; Brissac was referring to the surging crowds, so easily set in motion in a great city, and so dangerous ; even a King may be swept away by them, and fall among his enemies.

Henri replied that they should never take him prisoner. Nor indeed did they mean to do so. " No one wants," he said : " to keep a bird like me in a cage." But he yielded, and entered his capital wearing a cuirass beneath his cloak :

and in place of the white-plumed hat, so eloquent of peace, an iron helmet. His triumph, already marred by the rain and the deserted streets, was sadly damped by this array.

No one was abroad so early, and there were few faces at the windows ; the Royal troops, split up into detachments, dispersed a few stray Spaniards, cut down thirty *landsknechts* or threw them into the river ; and that was almost all. Monsieur de Saint-Luc and his company came upon a stronghold, halfheartedly defended by some burghers : but the King met with no resistance. He sent to the Duke of Feria ordering him to forthwith leave the city : a second messenger went to the church of Notre Dame, to announce that the King was on his way.

When the people of Paris awoke and left their beds, though the news sped from house to house, they would not believe that the King was in the city. They were aghast. Their first thought was of pillage and slaughter ; and this though many had seen him face to face at Saint-Denis when he recanted, or at his coronation at Chartres, and had sworn him fealty. That stood for little now. A day of pomp and ceremony is well enough : the day of victory was always a day of blood.

Nothing was further from Henri's mind than bloodshed, nor did he reckon with the fears of the populace. The new Marshal, Brissac, sent gendarmes on gigantic horses, chosen for their stentorian voices, to announce that the King was in possession of the city, and proclaim a general amnesty and pardon. The people of Paris were told to remain quietly at home. Whereat they promptly came forth, cheered the white scarves of the French soldiery, and the King's trumpeters, and carried the King himself shoulder-high to the cathedral.

All the bells of Notre-Dame were pealing, each in the familiar tone by which it was known and named. Ahead of the King walked a hundred French noblemen, in token that he was King indeed. But in that same ancient church there had but lately been intercessions to Saint Geneviève,

to defend her city of Paris against Henri. There were those who recalled them now : the Archpriest, who uttered the appropriate salutations, and the Cardinal who remained unseen. But the mob had forgotten : not the individuals who made it up, every one of whom remembered many things. But the mob, as though none of this had happened, surged into the cathedral and joined in the ceremony with every sign of glad devotion.

It was now for the King to speak, he closed his mind to all outside the moment ; and yet he felt uneasy. Before the event, he had known more clearly how matters would go forward, and had envisaged the things to come. He replied to the Archpriest : " I mean to protect my people and lighten their burdens, and in that purpose I will give the last drop of my blood ! " He also affirmed his Catholic faith, calling upon God and the Holy Virgin. But there was still a cloud upon his mind. He had the feeling that he was not there, and that all these people were denizens of a dream. The event now seemed trivial ; which was because he had been awaiting it too long.

. . . Paris, Paris was his, and acknowledged to be his. In yonder chapel hung a painting, depicting him as the Devil. He had noticed it, as indeed was observed, and the picture was taken away. . . . He knelt in the choir and heard Mass. Afterwards, when he stepped out on to the great flagged square, for one whole minute the scene faded, and before his inner vision appeared a wooden platform hung with tapestry, which had stood there an unimaginable time ago. Upon it he had been married to the Princess of Valois. He could measure the height of it against the façade of the church. Standing in the sparkling air amidst the flower of the kingdom, he had then looked down through a festal crowd, as though his were to be a delightful life, and he a favourite of fortune. And then began the School of Misery, he learned the Pallor of Thought, and became familiar with the Troubles of Life. Now—Paris. And what did that mean? That he would have to toil as hard as ever, be still more upon his guard,

turn every mishap to a good issue ; and Paris—he would never conquer Paris while he lived.

During that brief moment on the square of Notre-Dame, while Henri's eyes were sightless, his soldiers had managed to drive back the crowd beyond the roadway. He was shocked when he turned and saw them. "I can see," said the King ; "under what sort of tyranny these poor folk have been living,"—and he resolved, now the long struggle was over, to share it with this people. He commanded that they should be allowed to approach him again. "They are hungry for the sight of a King," said he, thereby signifying all that he had done and suffered for their sake.

He bore himself with a somewhat imposing air, as is inevitable on such days. Early that morning in the half-dark street he had caught a soldier purloining a loaf. The man knew no better. But the King was in his city of Paris. There should be no pillage in his city : though the baker could not have been in the least surprised. In a corner house a man stood at a window with his hat on, staring down insolently at the King. He believed indeed that he had nothing to lose, being in any case proscribed. The King's men were eager to seize the man, but the King would not let them, and there was much murmuring against this abandonment of common usage.

On his way from Notre-Dame to the Louvre every shout of welcome stirred the King's heart ; though he was repelled and irritated by the blatant folly of a cheering crowd. Thus he made his way through the city at last in his power—and well he knew that he must make his power felt, he had no business to have allowed a handful of citizens here and there to cheer him as he passed, while a thousand times as many, in their kitchens and their shops, went on with their daily lives, and at most said, as they paused for a moment in their tasks : "The King will be in a high humour at entering Paris. But it is a mood that will not last."

In a country town called Eauze, an unimaginable while

ago, a young King of Navarre sat at table, in the market-place with rich and poor, who had expected him to have them killed for not opening the gates of their own free will. Meantime he was dining in their company. Through him they made acquaintance with an attitude of mind that they had never met, called "humanity", and they were utterly taken aback. Men do not change in the passage of the years, and Henri longed to take his great city to his heart. Between Eauze and Paris, down the intervening years, stood a double line of mailed figures; the deeds that he had done. And so it was that every cheer between Notre-Dame and the Louvre jarred upon the King, although it also stirred his heart. He was in truth prepared for violence—and violence there was.

A priest, armed with a partisan, roused the mob against him. A ruffianly old survivor of Saint Bartholomew was knocked over in a scuffle, and broke his wooden leg and his musket. There was firing at the King's men from the windows. Henri also watched an effort to build a barricade, and enjoyed the sense of something actual and real, indeed he would otherwise have lost his way. He could tell it from the hostile efforts to bar his way, and so safely reached the Louvre. He sat down to dinner in the long gallery, the banquet was arrayed, all the courtiers and lackeys in their places, with all the air of having expected him for eighteen years. He flung care aside and ate with gusto, being careful not to look about him; he merely repeated his order that the Spaniards must withdraw by three o'clock, if they valued their lives.

The Duke of Feria, Governor for His Catholic Majesty, was not yet disposed to yield; he still held some of the outer wards. But Henri sent him a peremptory message, and Feria, who was no soldier, submitted. He gave way rather sooner than Philip's Paris supporters, the men who had drawn, and spent, his eighty thousand crowns; and with them any allegiance to the Ruler of the World was at an end. Outside the centre of the city, which was firmly under the King's control from Notre-Dame to the Louvre

—there, the dregs of what once had been the League still seethed. Wild men of every rank and degree, with fearsome, savage faces, brandishing their weapons :—in an hour's time they would be no more than ludicrous ; but here they were still formidable, fighting for a cause already lost.

An unarmed mob met them upon their own ground. Mostly lads, who cried in shrill high voices—"Long live the King !" These were followed by mounted heralds with trumpets, proclaiming peace and amnesty. After them came some magistrates ; and to them the last Leaguers laid down their arms. Indeed, there was nothing left for them to do, for they were met like men and brothers, with outstretched hands. For many, the whole of life was emptied of its purport, they could not shed their habits at a stroke ; here indeed was an end to force and fury, and the coarser view of life, if a pack of lads and lawyers could, when the hour struck, make plain the courage that lay behind a love of peace. Several of the wild men perished from the shock of the too sudden passage from madness back to sanity.

Of all that happened on that day, which was much—there was one thing only that his heart desired, and he meant to witness. He climbed the Porte Saint-Denis and stood at a window. Three o'clock ;—still no Spaniards. Yes, they come, treading very softly, hat in hand, in silence, and with eyes downcast. These mortals had been the proudest men alive, and they had conceived their empire, if not their persons, as immortal. They might indeed have lost cities in the past, but never had they marched out of one like this without a fight, merely because their time was past, and they had been deserted by their own master.

Rain pelted down upon them, but they held their heads erect ; some carts followed them with their baggage, which was scanty, for they had never been thieves. Their many children tripped along beside them, and their dogs padded after them with drooping ears. A woman on a cart cried : "Where is the King !" Long she looked at

him, then raised her voice and cried : " Good King, great King, I pray God for your good fortune." Proud Spanish woman ! In a closed and shuttered coach drove the Papal Legate. The King waved a hand after it ; and wondered why his ironic gesture came to a sudden standstill. The Duke of Feria, a grave, gaunt figure, left his carriage to comply with the formalities imposed upon the vanquished. He bowed with dignity, moving with stiff and measured strides, and had passed Henri before the King could find a word. Spanish soldiers closed ranks round the Duke's carriage : the remainder of the troops were Neapolitans, German *landsknechts*, and Walloons, an epitome in little of the World Empire. The commanders of the last companies turned their heads at the King's parting words : " Salute your master, but do not come back." And he added in an undertone to the bystanders : " I wish him a good recovery." Which was greeted with much laughter.

Henri contained his exultation, or it would have burst all decency ; he doubted his own fortunes. If our life has an aim—we know not what, it is never achieved. He was delighted to find that his feet were wet. The Spaniards would have to make their long march in water-logged boots. . . . How was the weather when you rode up from the South, and seized my kingdom and occupied my capital ? I was a child when I first heard that men had enemies, and you were mine. See my grey beard, what a struggle it has been ! And it seems so only in recollection : a gallant enemy has kept me cheerful and light-hearted half my life. To-day I receive my reward—for a life of tenfold toil, but I have won it. Pass on, and farewell, my gallant enemies !

His vision clouded, and he stumbled as he made his way down the staircase. Affairs awaited him in the Louvre, and he said : " I am drunk with joy. What say you ? " For a while he strode silently up and down the gallery ; then suddenly he halted, stepped forward stiffly for a pace or two, and swept off his hat with a magnificent air. Yes, he was aping the Duke of Feria's last melancholy

salutation, as was noted not without disgust. For the rest of the day he wore the bewildered air of one astray in a strange world. "Chancellor," said he, to Dame de Sourdis's friend; "can I believe that I am really here?"

He recovered himself when a few high members of the League hurried to pay their respects, answered curtly and turned his back on them; there was too much haste to claim what each conceived as his deserts. But the King's angry shrug was but one expression of his joy. A few hours later Henri had received certain submissions that could not be honestly intended; the elders of the city brought him mead and tapers, together with asseverations of their poverty; and he brought himself to praise the goodness of their hearts. But he promptly sent mounted couriers after the Papal Legate to induce him to return. Whatever the Legate had wanted, were it even a genuflection; from the most faithful son of the Church he could have any sort of pious demonstration, and any fantasy of faith professed.

Meantime the priest in the closed and shuttered coach drove on. It was not known that evening in the Louvre whether he had been overtaken by the King's messengers. The castle lay in the centre of the city, and that day the King had seized power. To-morrow the news would echo in the ears of all the world, in those night hours rumour sped along all her highways; on the morrow the minds of all men living would be possessed by the greatness of the King, for the reward of his achievements renewed their splendour. Nothing could withstand his name, he would be the most tremendous figure in the world;—but under the falling rain, along those sodden roads, every one of which lead to Rome, a closed and shuttered coach rumbled inexorably southwards.

King Henri, in his palace of the Louvre, saw it like a moving insect, very small but very clear. And this crawling object would move faster than Fame that flies on wings. It would arrive everywhere before the news of that day's doings. Whenever it was reported, at Courts

or among the people, that the King of France had seized and now held his capital, there would be voices to reply : Rome will have none of him. Then were his deeds as good as undone, nor was he really in his capital. . . . And he repeated to all whom he received : " This is the day of days : " but he could put no heart into the words.

The spasmodic jerking of the King's shoulder gradually made plain to all that company that they were unwelcome, and one by one they took their leave. Then, through all the rooms and cabinets of his palace the King wandered like a man in a dream. Sometimes he would pause, and clap his hands to his head, as some fresh thought had come to him : no, it was always the same. He had let that coach escape : and now he knew, too, why the hand he waved at it had stopped abruptly in mid-air. " Well ? " he cried, recoiling at the sight of some strange faces ; for he knew they must be birds of ill omen. They told him that a certain pertinacious priest had been murdered in his cloister for advising the monks to recognize the King. Henri pretended to shrug his shoulders over such a trifle.

But the tears came into his eyes. " I am grateful to my enemies," said he to the bearers of the news ; " for saving me the trouble of having them arrested." Whereupon they too observed from the King's quick movements that they were not wanted. Henri called one of them back and bade him hasten to the ladies Guise and Montpensier. They were his enemies, and were now surely quaking in terror of his vengeance. Let them take comfort, and be assured of his friendship—such was his message. At last he was almost alone. " Armagnac, where has everyone gone ? " The First Chamberlain emerged from a secluded corner ; he began by pacing round the room to make sure that no one was still there. Then he launched into something of a speech—the reason being that for some while he had had his eye upon his master, at every turn of the day's events, and he knew exactly what had gone forward on that day of days.

THE SENSE OF RETURN

"Sire ! The strangers have gone back to their own place, and even your noblemen have left the palace, for several reasons, of which I conceive there are three. First, you did not invite any one of them to stay ; indeed you encouraged them to go. Second, you have been in an extremely cheerful mood, with which most of them could not keep pace. The Spaniards, indeed, were the only ones who could stand up to you, and they have therefore departed as plain and determined enemies of Your Majesty. Those, on the other hand, who remain, can scarce present themselves as enemies. It is their task at the moment to transform themselves into your good friends and subjects ; not merely from fear, which would indeed be natural enough. But secure from all vengeance, and thanks to your unimaginable clemency, Sire, there exists a pack of traitors and murderers,—men who have lived by violence and treachery,—who are suddenly to step into the background and change their very hearts. Sire, you surely realize that there's not a man who would do so, even supposing that he could. That is the second reason why these rooms are empty."

"And the third ?" asked Henri, as Armagnac paused, and began to busy himself about the room. "There were surely three ?"

"There is indeed another," said the nobleman slowly, as he struck a spark with flint and steel, and lit some tapers. "It was fortunate that the worthy city elders presented you with these tapers. Now look about you. All this day you have not once cast your eyes round your palace of the Louvre."

Henri did so, and at last noticed that the place was bare of furniture. In all the vague confusion of his joy he had long since had the sense that he was not really there. The Louvre it was—but emptied out : now, by the light of a few tapers which he and Monsieur d'Armagnac carried

along echoing galleries and up and down the staircases, he saw how his palace had been stripped. In the chamber of the old Queen Catherine de Medici, known as Madame Catherine, his first glance fell upon the coffer, where Margot, his Margot, used to crouch, immersed in leather-bound tomes. But the coffer was a mere mirage of candle-light and memory, and the reality was now an empty space.

Dead, like most of their former habitants, were these rooms that had been hers. Here had come, one day long ago, two men in black, bearing with them a drawing on parchment of an empty skull, which they spread out on the table : young Henri's mother had lately died of poison, and the suspect had sat there and faced him across that table. It had gone, and with it all that had filled that room. The pictures of the past begin to fade, now that table and coffer are gone. We pass into another room ; there the tall chimney-piece still stands supported by the stone figures of Mars and Ceres, the work of a master named Goujon. The sight of them recalled a game of cards once played in that room. The card table rose out of some spectral cavity and with it came the sinister card party. Blood that none could stanch oozed from beneath the cards, a dark omen for the players ; they had indeed all perished, their blood had vanished like their cards.

Between those departed tapestries Charles the Ninth had stamped shrieking back and forth ; that window, now dismantled of its curtains, he had slammed and barred, to shut out the screams of murder. On the night of Saint Bartholomew Henri had sought release in madness ; he feigned a frenzy on that journey through the palace, which had indeed been a journey through the underworld. A huddle of corpses everywhere—some of friends and some of foes. Where—where was Margot ? The shattered chairs had gone, and where was that strip of violet and yellow embroidery he remembered as having been thrown over those two young corpses yonder ?—had it all happened ? A plot demands a setting ; and against that empty scene

his memories grew dim. . . . I am overjoyed, and cannot believe that I am really here—the words circled in his head as he, the lone survivor, carrying his candle before him, wandered more slowly and silently from room to room, until he seemed to be creeping along the walls.

His sole living companion had gone down into the old courtyard, called the well-shaft of the Louvre, to see if he could find anyone in the kitchen, or perhaps discover something that might serve for supper. Now and again he shouted cheerfully from below, for Armagnac was uneasy at his master's condition, and only wished he could have brought him a cup of wine. And indeed Henri was near to seeing visions. In the great gallery he was met by a violent gust of air. Within the dim outlines of windows that had not before been opened he could descry a throng of shadowy forms; gentlemen and ladies of a bygone Court, jostling each other as they peered at the ravens. A swarm of them fluttered down into the well-shaft of the Louvre; the odour they loved most had brought them there, and as darkness fell they set about their prey.

The spell was broken by Armagnac, who shouted that he thought he could see a span of light ahead. If he were wrong he would send out soldiers from the guard, for he did not intend that his master should spend such an evening sober. "Patience, Sire!" But patience was the feeblest of his master's spiritual forces at that moment. Suddenly he turned, at the approach of shuffling footsteps—they were really beyond hearing, even for ears like his; but one sense warned him; surely the same sense of return that had brought him visions of that perished Court. Well, spirits must be faced like living people: let them see they were suspected for what they were, and they grew dangerous. So he lifted his guttering taper high above his head, and calmly awaited what might appear.

It was a squat, hunched figure, not unlike that of the new Marshal Brissac; and indeed for an instant Henri thought it was the Marshal. Then the creature came within the dim reflection of the taper and revealed a strange face,

a face indeed that seemed no longer of this world. It had a shadowy mask, with hollow eye-sockets, and between strands of white hair, a glimpse of sicklier white ; a touch of the hand, and it would surely dissolve. And Henri had no wish that this apparition should vanish too. "My name is Olivier," said a quavering voice. Henri noticed that the creature was now more bent than ever, and indeed was clearly afraid. Now fear is the very last emotion that spirit would display. What could make a spirit tremble? And the creature that had called itself Olivier was trembling now.

"Begone!" cried Henri, not so much in anger, as to see what the apparition would do: it promptly answered:

"I may not leave this palace."

"I grieve to hear it," said Henri, curtly as before, still uncertain as to the powers that might have penned a living being within this desolate Louvre. "How long have you been here?"

"Speak out and speak clearly," added Henri, who began to feel uneasy. "If you have a tale to tell, let it be such as I can understand."

The apparition named Olivier dropped on its knees—almost without a sound; but the movement was not the movement of a ghost; here was a miserable human creature, a head shorter now, who moaned: "Sire! Spare my grey hairs. It would profit you nothing to have me hanged. The furniture has gone for ever. I have paid long and heavily for my unfaithful stewardship of the Louvre."

Henri understood, and recovered his self-possession. "So it was you that stripped the place," said he. "Good. You have made away with what is mine; that is a matter with which I will duly deal. Now tell me how it happened, and how such a rascal came to be put in charge of this Royal palace."

"Indeed I too wonder now," answered the creature from the level of his knees. "But when I was chosen, I was esteemed a decent man, who had managed his own

property with prudence. And it was thought but that he would be the man to safeguard the Crown of France from damage. And I myself would have taken my oath that I was. Sire ; I have been no better than a pickthief, and I know how a man falls to thieving."

" Well—— ? "

" For several reasons."

" Three, I daresay."

" Thrice indeed, Sire. How did Your Majesty know ? "

With a fresh outburst of groaning, the man raised his upturned hands in supplication. " I am so stricken that toe and knee will no longer support my body, and I am as good as starved. For years past the fear of hanging has kept me prisoner in the deepest cellars of this desolate castle. I scarce dare to burn a light, lest a glimpse of it be seen, and it is only at night that I crawl out in search of food." So saying, to prove his words, he dropped on hands and knees, looking uncommonly doglike. And from that, his lowest level, he continued :

" But when I first came here, I walked upright like a man, I had a regiment of lackeys, and treasures beyond price were in my charge. Yonder stood a table of pure gold, with ruby-studded feet : on that wall hung a tapestry embroidered with five thousand pearls, depicting the wedding of Samson and Delilah, and the revels of Helio-gabalus." As he spoke, the former Steward of the Palace shuffled on all fours, and with surprising speed, to the familiar spots ; it was clearly long since he had moved in any other fashion.

" Enough ! " cried Henri. " Stand up ! " Shaking his white mane, like a great poodle, the old creature staggered to his feet. " Fellow," said Henri, and he spoke in a heartening tone. " Confess your secrets."

He had a hope that some of the vanished treasures had been stowed by the madman in obscure hiding-places in the Palace, and Henri well remembered how he had come upon such refuges, when his life here had been so constantly in peril. But the madman suddenly said some-

thing quite beyond expectation. "Sire, I came upon you alone, and in the darkness, when I was running from your nobleman, because he had found my light. You had been looking upon old acquaintances in the darkness. The former Court had returned. The air was laden with the fragrance of these great lords and their ladies, and with it was mingled the rich odours of the kitchen. The rich furnishings of the rooms and cabinets gleamed in the red glare of huge torches."

"No, no—not all that," muttered Henri ; he was taken aback, and once more, he was irked to find, rather alarmed by this old creature.

"I saw it all," said the other, with a cackle. "I felt myself all the while under the watchful eyes of unseen presences, who would not always so remain. I had to pay for my knowledge of the past, and for having been a Humanist. I ought then to have fled and surrendered my stewardship. But no. I gave feasts, I banqueted in splendour with rich men of my kind, and a throng of parasites, who were welcome enough if they could present some semblance of old Courts. And I had at my call many lovely, costly women, jewels of women, and they ate my fortune up."

"That, my good fellow, was to be easily foreseen," interposed Henri.

"But had I stayed one single night alone in the castle," whispered the madman ; "those unseen presences, who lurked everywhere—indeed I would suddenly catch sight of a peering face—they would certainly have wrung my neck."

"You not bear to live here," remarked Henri. "And the second reason ?"

"The second reason was the terror of the times. Paris was a sink of license and disorder, while Your Majesty was winning your great victories, and it was just then your pleasure to besiege the city and starve us out. He who has no money left to squander, pours forth blood. And what happened in this place, and at what nightlong orgies, I say nothing."

"Enough!" cried Henri once again. "Proceed. So by degrees your needs were such that you had to strip the palace."

The creature bowed so low that its white locks masked its face. "Ah, it was despair as much as wickedness. Sire, permit a learned Humanist to tell you that despair makes a man wicked, and wickedness is close kin to despair. I wanted to see the end of all these things, that was my temptation; and even to-day I am proud of what was done, for the end has been a fitting end for one who was once great and powerful, now that his desire is sated, and he has stripped the palace of the Kings of France."

Henri summed up. "First; this was no place for a man of your kind; second—you practised what was not uncommon in your time, you ate the flesh of men. Last; your curiosity has reached as far as death. And death you shall now meet."

Here rang out a living voice, that of Monsieur d'Armagnac, who spoke from outside, underneath the window, to which he had climbed halfway up the wall. He had been anxious to discover with whom his master was parleying in the darkness. The stump of candle, stuck to the bare floor, was now flickering to its end. Armagnac had heard a good deal. "Sire," said he; "throw the fellow out, I'll see his business settled."

The creature which had called itself Olivier seemed solely set upon its own concerns. He had paid as little heed to the King's words as to Armagnac's shout. "Now I'll run like a dog," he muttered, as though to himself alone, then actually dropped on his hands and scurried round the room. Whereupon he stood up, as near erect as he could manage, and almost in a man's voice the figure said: "You see?—that is the price I never cease to pay for the brief and pleasant years of life that came before. It was a very gay and gallant fellow who was transformed into a dog. When I was stripping the palace of the King's treasures and selling them,—O how those lovely ladies snatched the money that I got. They were so proud to think it

all came from a palace and loved me for it, bless them !”

“ All of them ? ” asked Henri, full of unwilling sympathy.

“ All. And there were not a few ; a double number, the second figure fourfold the first.”

Suddenly, in that white, flaccid face, the eyes glittered, and then blinked, just as Henri had noticed in the last of his would-be murderers. He was indeed prepared for the number ; it was the computation of his mistresses, of which he had already heard the tale. This was what the madman was about to utter : not so mad either, that he did not glimpse a chance of saving his skin by implicating the King at the last moment.

“ Twenty-eight ” muttered the man of many parts : now a cringing dog, but once a gay and gallant fellow, a vampire, a faithless steward, and a ghost. Henri promptly grasped him by the collar, heaved him out of the window and let him drop. Monsieur d’Armagnac picked up the huddled heap and carried it to its destined place. His solitary footstep receded into the distance.

The last stump of candle had burnt down and guttered out : but the King, who had that day seized power, at this point felt still more in need of the chair that was not there. It had been a weary day, and that last hour had seemed to Henri the weariest of all. He had indeed found this encounter most burdensome and baffling, and yet it still possessed his mind. There had been indeed more point than sense in it, and it was not quite in vain that the madman, who had called himself—so pointedly—a Humanist, had tried to implicate the King in his own ruin. . . . Henri pondered. ‘ After all, he had a wife, who alone cost more than the whole tale of his mistresses together. And he owned three shirts. He had remitted all taxes, dues and contributions from Paris for ten years, whereby it became no easier for him to buy the remainder of his kingdom. I have to encourage trade in place of war, which had hitherto been the most important business of the realm. He did not yet see how each of his

subjects, even now and then, could have a chicken in the pot.

He walked to the window, through which the moonlight now glimmered from a rent in the drifting clouds. A task, he reflected, for more than one man. . . . He knew one man who would stand by his side, but only one. What needed doing must be done at once, for he meant that France should be the first kingdom in the West on the day he came to die. He bade himself stand fast, and Rosny too, so long as they were there. And then? He prayed that his dear lady might give him a son that he might enter into his kingdom. . . . Without her, and lost her body it could never be truly his. And these words he breathed aloud, to the moon, in a murmur as soft and intimate as the moon's own beams.

The King, who had that day seized power, fell to pondering on the moon, where his fleeting fancy conceived the charming Gabrielle as denizen. He had indeed lodged her in a discreetly resplendent palace not away; so near now seemed that gracious star. . . . The circled candelabra will be glittering in your apartments at that hour, Madame, I stand and listen and breathe your radiance, Marquise. . . .

Such pleasing fantasies were promptly dispelled by the First Chamberlain, who brought tidings that concerned the King in more material fashion. First, he had found a bed-chamber for the King, and led the way to it. Henri followed him absently up and down stair-cases and along passages, paying no heed to where he went; nor was he interested in the doings of his Chamberlain elsewhere. The latter began, as he was drawing off his master's shoes:

"The man Olivier is in chains and under guard."

"He had long been under guard here in the Louvre," observed Henri with a yawn. Armagnac continued in a faintly reproving tone. "The First President of your Parliament came from his bed to examine the man, who confessed to all his crimes, and several clerks were needed to draw up the indictment. He will be tried at dawn."

"Quick work, indeed. Where is he to hang? And why are you dragging at my shoes in that way?"

"He will hang on the Louvre bridge, that all Paris may see how the King punishes criminals. Sire; I shall have to cut your shoes off. They are thick with mud, and have stuck to your feet."

"It was raining hard when the Spaniards marched out. Leave the shoes on my feet to remind me of the Spaniards while I sleep. I shall not sign Olivier's death-warrant."

"Sire, the people will not love you unless that fantastic rascal, who sold your furniture, hangs on the Louvre bridge."

Armagnac proceeded to slit the sodden leather, and when he had freed his master's feet, he warmed them in his hands. As he did so, he looked up, and Henri saw that this was not the Armagnac of twenty years ago. He would never have said: Sire, your people will not love you. He paid not the least heed to the matter—first, because he would never have conceived it as in doubt, and second because the bold fighter of those days was never beset by any doubts at all. He was always on the spot when his master was in peril, and the Duke of Guise, the darling of the people, was near to being cloven in twain by Armagnac, of which indeed the latter made no secret when the moment was past: the very thought of it had made the Duke turn pale.

"Friend," said Henri with concern: "what is the matter?"

There was a gentle, almost diffident look upon Armagnac's face.

"In old days you would never have conceived my people's love as depending on whether or no a man was hanged." He was growing old, thought his master, though he did not say so. Old age, he supposed, must sap a man's self-confidence.

"Do you recognize this room?" said Armagnac suddenly. Henri started, and looked about him. A room

of moderate size, a battered lath bed with a straw mattress ; but strange to see, above it, against the crumbling ceiling, a ragged canopy. Through all those years it had endured above the place where once the young King of Navarre had lain with his wife in marriage bed, with his forty noblemen around him ; but had left the bed too soon. The night was not over, and it was to be a night of murder until far into the day.

"Why am I here ?" asked the King, who had that day seized power. "I do not care to know. Hang your thief upon the bridge that my citizens of Paris may see that the ghosts are banished. I'll have no more of them about me. I mean to live in the Louvre as though it were a new-built palace, there shall be no breath nor memory of the old one left. I have a new people also, and upon the past their lips, like mine, are sealed. The ghost is hanged, away with him. My people shall love me, because I and they shall work together."

TWO TOILERS

One morning a strange pair visited the workshop of Gérome the tanner, an open building between street and yard, in a much frequented neighbourhood. The shorter man was the King, the taller his faithful servant Rosny ; as was promptly discovered by the inhabitants of the street as soon as they appeared. A few soldiers cleared a passage, shouting : "Make way for the King !"

The entertainment began when the King said to the old craftsman : "Well, good fellow ? Do you want another journeyman ?" The tanner, in his astonishment, said—Yes ; and in a trice the King stood in his shirt-sleeves, which he had rolled up to the elbow, and so set about the task, as he had learned it by watching the master. He was rather clumsy, and inclined to let the leather slip away into the waste that ran in a gutter across the yard and into a tank. Several strips of leather were lost before

the old tanner noticed. He considered whether he should treat the matter with the respect due to the royal person, or as a master-tanner would do ; but promptly resolved to act as master and not as subject, and he demanded that the damage be made good.

The doorway was thronged with onlookers. The wily trader thought that he would extract as many pistoles from the King, as there were hides afloat in the tank. But it was soon brought home to him that the King's tall companion was his better at a bargain. Monsieur de Rosny beat down the sum until it stood at about the value of the leather. The astounded tanner scratched his head, while the people from the street roared with laughter. The King, who had all this while been working without a word, waved a hand for silence ; then, as he washed his hands and put on his doublet, he addressed the company.

"Good people ; I have here tested myself at a trade, and I will admit that I have worked to little purpose, though indeed the start is always difficult ; still, it is not from me that you will learn how leather may well and truly tanned. But it was my purpose that you should understand why our native leather, once so much esteemed in Europe, has fallen out of use. It is because, after this interminable civil war, with all its disorder in which no man can work, there are few journeymen tanners more skilled than I. My master Gérome employs none, they merely let his hides slip into the waste. Am I right, master ? "

"Sire, your words are golden," said the man, now resolved to take the respectful line. "How does Your Majesty know about such humble matters ? "

Henri knew about them through his faithful servant, who had discovered them in some fashion of his own. Rosny was a soldier, but his insight into all matters concerning commerce was remarkable ; his King resolved to turn it to good use ; and hence the visits of that strange pair to the more populous streets. The King winked imperceptibly at his follower ; then he turned again to the bystanders.

"Friends!" said he; "pray think of the good name of our trade. Do you want bright crowns to put into your stocking, eh?"

They answered—Yes; but still with hesitation. The King proceeded:

"And you like good food, friends. A chicken in the pot on Sundays."

To this they did agree, and did so heartily; and two poor women cried: "Long live the King!"

"And my people shall have it," he replied. "Have you sons?" he asked. "How old are they? And what do they do?"

He was told that the lads did nothing at all. For trade was ruined.

"No: your sons learn nothing. Where are they? Bring them forth," said the King, and as the boys were of course among the wide-eyed crowd—for indeed a boy will scarce move out of the street where he was born—the King promptly handed them over to the master-tanner. In so doing, he laid his hands upon their heads and stroked their hair. At this, and this alone, the two mothers burst into tears. Other women did so likewise, and the scene would have been most edifying, had not Rosny and the tanner once more begun to haggle over the prentice money. At last the King's servant paid it out to the old man, so briskly that the jewels on his fingers flashed. The King reminded the tanner that the boys must be provided with white bread and wine; if they were proved incompetent, half the prentice money would be forfeit; the remainder was to be brought back by the tanner to the Louvre.

The King's precision pleased the people even more than his generosity. They fell back as he emerged, and cleared the centre of the street without any pressure from the soldiers. Then, at that nicely calculated spot, a litter swung down the street, with plumes swaying from its painted and enamelled roof; and was set down outside the tanner's house. "Is this the Rue de la Feronnerie?" said the lady inside it to one of the porters. Monsieur

de Rosny was beside the litter in a trice, and he whispered urgently : "No more, Madame, for God's sake. It was arranged that this encounter should be an accident."

"Forgive me. My poor head ! I forget my part," said Gabrielle ; and indeed she looked pale and weary. Monsieur de Rosny spoke her next words himself, to avoid any further mishap. "How marvellous to meet thus in a great city, as though there were but a single street !"

This was Henri's cue, and he duly picked it up. At the same moment the bells from a neighbouring church nearby began their peal of noon. "Madame," said the King, hat in hand ; "I was just on my way home, to eat my dinner with you, like all good folk at this hour." Whereat the people murmured their applause at this reverence for their customs. As the porters were lifting the litter, she said hurriedly—regardless once more of her role :

"Sire, that is a strange sign on the house you have just left."

Henri looked round. On the wall above the archway hung the device of a crowned heart pierced with an arrow.

Henri recoiled, he could not tell why, he felt a chill shudder clutch at his heart. Crowned and pierced. Turning to Gabrielle, he said : "Madame, there is a heart for which you prepare the like fate ; crowned, and pierced."

It was said softly, for her ears alone. He touched the tips of her outstretched fingers, and escorted the lady to her litter through the applauding murmurs of the crowd. Rosny followed, and his face was that of a proud and trusted servant of his King. Behind the mask he was laughing at the pantomime. She had to act it—but his opinion of the lovely d'Estrées none the less never altered ; he thought her stupid. Still, he was quite ready to ignore her want of wit as well as her more dangerous aspects, and for the present to make common cause with her. Those who have created a new realm must stand together, if the rising regime is to breed faith in the people and take firm shape within their minds.

And so they passed on, the litter, the porters, the King, his faithful servant—escorted by a few guards through the populous city of Paris, that not so long ago would not have let them pass unscathed. Rosny listened, street by street, to every word he could catch. Henri pretended to be wholly occupied with Gabrielle; but there was little that he missed. Someone in the crowd shouted: “Who is the lady?” And a rough soldier answered, as he thrust the man back: “The King’s whore,”—which was by no means meant as an estimation of the lady, he merely used the term he knew. But as the man was one of the King’s own guard, the crowd laughed; and before that laughter could grow dangerous, the King laughed too. It could thus do no hurt.

Indeed, it was the King’s purpose that there should be no hurt done to any man. Change from disorder to the reign of law should come to pass almost unnoticed. He was, in fact, convinced in his own heart that in these days the future was at stake, both for himself and for his kingdom; and what was now allowed to get out of hand could never be caught up. He had been King in name for five years now; which, he thought, explained his store of patience. A sense as of something imminent was on him, as though he were expected, everywhere and all the time, and salvation hung on every minute. Of this he gave no sign, neither to the populace, nor at his new-furnished Court, nor at his Privy Council. He was simple, gracious and good-humoured, and for that very reason he was to be laid low by a virulent fever—which was indeed the price he always had to pay after his greatest efforts and the crises of his life, once met and mastered. His body was mixing that malady in secret, while there was yet no mark of it upon him—except for the eye of a meditative observer among the many who were then about his person. He might, at least after a while, have guessed. When His Majesty lay prostrate, at the inevitable moment, murmuring into his huddled blankets what only his sister and the First Chamberlain could hear,—Huguenot psalms; then

anyone might well have said : "Aha !" So it was. Many strange things were therewith made clear.

His usual companion, Rosny, had no leisure for such observation ; and it is very sure that he did not see the approach of a fever from which the King had so long been free. He was wholly absorbed in economy and ballistics, apart from his concern for his own advancement. The Governorship of the city of Nantes was all that he had hitherto achieved. His kind but wary master was by no means disposed to put Protestants into the Council of Finance ; the members, all Catholics, had regarded his appointment as the sign of coming upheaval. Not so much from anxiety for the Faith, but rather on account of their private exactions. Embezzlement of the revenue was, for the army of finance officials, even the very highest of them, both natural and permissible. But suddenly they became faintly conscious that, at King Henri's advent to power, these usages would be called in question, if not actually threatened.

The King took care that they were warned, first merely in no more than humorous fashion, on the casual occasions that were always ready to his hand. He still frequented the company of common folk, travelled here and there on his affairs, won his subjects' money at ball-play, and put it away in his hat. "It's safe there," he cried ; "and no one shall ease me of one stiver, I'll keep it out of the hands of my finance officials." Which was promptly carried to their ears, but they had little fear of the King, who in a cheerful mood often said more than he meant ; they scented danger from another quarter.

In a house known as the Arsenal sat one who checked all their incomings. So much they knew. From that secluded house came forth no word, save only the whisper of their spies. The man in his guarded cabinet drew up tall columns of figures, proving how prices had risen while Spanish gold was still pouring into the country. Wages had not followed them ; and since the streams of pistoles had dried up—the high prices still remained, which meant

a good life for the few who could afford it, but not for the many. Self-murder was common, and the roads became unsafe. This was usually explained by the growing contempt for religion, and open revolt against public order.

But the silent toiler in the house known as the Arsenal investigated other causes, the discovery of which was to many most unwelcome. They would gladly have haled him out of that house, which was but a hundred paces to the Seine ; and it would be a deed well done to throw the man and all his calculations on a dark night into the river, so deep that he never reappeared. Unfortunately the expert upon trade and commerce was also an artilleryman of note. His memoranda for the King dealt with industry and agriculture, but also with the improvement of cannon. In the courtyard of his house were posted guns and their gunners, so that he was not easy of approach. He never rode out unguarded, especially when carrying his memoranda to the King. Which meant an escort and some ceremony, but he was then seen at his best. Above all, he knew all about the worthy folk who lived on pickings from the State. It was but too clear that he meant to urge his master to the extremest measures.

Not indeed directly. No one understood Rosny, although they had all seen him at work. What was he, after all, and why these high pretensions ? Anyone could blow up a tower with a huge charge of powder. When a Governor was to be bought, he, as intermediary, acquired the city of Rouen without the use of much intelligence ; but not the Grand Mastership of artillery. That was held by the great lady's father, a nincompoop who grew crazier every day. Monsieur de Rosny, as was well known, had never forgiven that depredation. It was notorious that he was on the worst of terms with the great lady : at the bottom of his heart, always assuming that the man with the stone face had a bottom to his heart, he also hated his King, of that there was no doubt. Monsieur de Villeroy had said in confidence that it was so, and thus it was commonly repeated. Monsieur de Rosny hated the King ; but he

feared, and with justice, for his life, if he betrayed him. On the other hand, he was excessively avaricious ; promises, and a bribe that could be recovered from him after a premature demise, would, they thought, bring him over to their side. That was indeed his intention ; these memoranda were merely meant for use by the rogue as blackmail.

Monsieur de Villeroy, who so grossly misunderstood Rosny, indeed thought the world was full of rogues ; no experience could ever have taught him how it was possible to achieve anything except by roguery. Again and again he had betrayed the King to the League and the League to the King—without the special arts and dissimulations that had enabled that fly-catching Humanist, Brissac, to stage an elaborate scene and betray no matter whom, merely for the sake of the performance. That was not the method of Monsieur de Villeroy, a much clumsier villain. Henri, who was a good judge of men, at once appointed him to his Finance Council. There Villeroy practised his depredations, and being fully occupied, did not lend himself to a darker scheme that was mooted in those days : to kidnap the King, remove him to one of the disaffected provinces, and put him up to auction. If the great rebels bid highest, he would die : if he did, he might keep his throne.

Henri, knowing all there was to know about Monsieur de Villeroy and his kind, left them to their self-enrichment, though that did not prevent him warning them, always in jesting, genial fashion, even though he no longer let the warning be carried to their ears, but gave it them himself. Monsieur de Villeroy had a magnificent estate, to which the King paid a visit, unannounced and with just a modest escort of twelve or fifteen gentlemen, and no lackeys nor baggage ; and they were hungry. The King went straight into the cowshed, where a worthy woman was at her milking. "O Sire—good master," said she.

"That am I for all who work honestly as you do," said he, and asked for a cup of milk. All the noblemen sat

down with the King at Villeroy's sumptuous table, and nothing was permitted to be served except milk. This did not perturb the wealthy Villeroy. The King was romantic, a lover of nature. "My entertainment would be too costly if we had anything but milk," said he after gulping it down, for he was a ready talker, and liked to make the company laugh. Monsieur de Villeroy laughed with the rest. This buffoon was not yet the King who would catch him in the act. No need to think of Louis the Eleventh and his executioner. Rosny's columns of figures would merely bore this swaggering cavalryman. The artilleryman would pester the cavalryman into schemes of administration that would set both the people and their betters by the ears. They would certainly cost him his kingdom, as Villeroy announced later, with much approval, in the Finance Council. The new reign could not last, why shorten it? it would owe them all much money before the end.

One day Monsieur de Rosny rode to the Louvre. These were still the first days of the new reign, April weather; a shower of rain fell as he rode. Now he treasured good clothes; he could not bear that his hat and ruff should be sodden by the rain; and he had in mind, too, the diamonds that adorned these objects, as well as their master's cloak. By the old bridge of Saint-Michel, when the rain was at its worst, Monsieur de Rosny pulled his horse into an archway; his people could well stay outside. There he witnessed what in those days was only too common: a man preparing to jump into the river. His movements were unmistakable; on the deserted bridge he was to be seen by any one who looked out of the houses on this side and the further side. But there were none, either because they feared the lashing rain, or the event was too familiar. The man took off his shoes, though there was little to take off, they were leathern rags. He flung threadbare doublet into the water, and emerged naked, a poor atom that to Monsieur de Rosny seemed barely worth the saving. He would however have beckoned to his men,

but in the meantime the creature had scrambled up and across the parapet, and needed but to let himself drop ; no one could have reached him in time.

But someone did. From the further side—in that breathless moment it was hard to see whence—someone seemed to hurtle through the air, such leaps he took ; grabbed the suicide's foot and dragged him back. The man yelled as the rough stone ripped his skin. Bleeding, humiliated and defiant he stood before his rescuer, raised his fist—then suddenly let it fall, and sank on to his knees. His rescuer was the King.

Rosny's light blue eyes were opened wide at this performance. It had annoyed him, for he felt that he should not have been the sole spectator, the river-banks should not have been deserted. A vast assemblage was the proper audience for the rescue of a suicide by his King. Monsieur de Rosny was convinced, or nearly so, that the parts here played had been duly assigned, though the scene had been less well organized than that in the tanner's shop some while before. Moreover the bad weather had driven the public away. However, a few people collected, as the worst of the storm had passed, and there was now no more than a drizzle. Monsieur de Rosny watched the King take off his cloak—no doubt to wrap round the shoulders of the naked man.

Monsieur de Rosny, glancing round him, assured himself that this gesture at least had not gone unremarked ; he then felt it to be time that he should take his own place in the transaction. He rode on to the bridge and obsequiously offered his horse to the King ; he would never otherwise have thus offered it to the King, and with but an ill grace to Saint Martin, had he known him. Henri burst out laughing and said : " Look at the cloak ; is it any better than the doublet that went down-stream ? Give the fellow some money. If I have no work for him, I must see he does not starve. Send one of your people with him to the hospital, to make sure they take him in."

This said, he mounted. The scene had been brief, but

every word had told. An onlooker that was not stirred must indeed be narrow of heart and mind. The rescued man bowed courteously and said, in a voice that rang pleasantly upon the ear : "Sire, I must die. The like of me are not worth maintaining by Your Majesty, when there's no work in the cloth or leather trades, nor even in the fields. I have been a student of theology, so I shall be able to report in the next world that our King Henri loves and means to help his people."

Therewith he walked off with the soldier, and for the spectators, who had in the meantime swelled into a crowd, he who stood so near to the next world, was now the most important personage. The King, but for his rank, had taken second place, and now scarce touched the people's hearts. When he put his horse to a trot, they fell back to avoid the scattering slush, but with an air of blank indifference on their faces. So he rode off at an even brisker trot, on Monsieur de Rosny's dapple-grey, with its master half a length behind him on the dismounted soldier's charger. The little cavalcade of six or seven horsemen soon reached the Louvre without attracting much attention. Rosny asked for an audience, and Henri led him into a great empty room looking out on the river, and open to the wind and sun, the April sun, now shining in all its radiance.

"This," said Henri, as he paced up and down, "shall be left empty until I get my furnishings from my castle in Pau ; I will live with no others. They are the finest I have ever seen in any castle of this kingdom."

Rosny, limited as was the extent of his knowledge, understood, or thought he did. His master wanted to relate his present great position with the much lighter burden of days now past. Did he need encouragement ? Was the furniture inherited from his mother's House intended as a visible reminder of his high ascent ?

"Sire," said that faithful servant : "all know that a Prince of the Blood is now in power. A King must not go decked with chains and rings like a nobleman without

office or honour. But never leave the Louvre without the escort of a few persons who look as I do ! Then, if need be, you may wear an old cloak, to bestow it on the naked."

Henri was bewildered by these words, not because they were too boldly spoken, but the intention behind them was mistaken. He had not in fact gone unescorted to the Saint-Michel bridge, to rescue a would-be suicide who was waiting for that purpose. By way of answer, he related an experience.

"I was riding alone yesterday along the road to Saint-Germain. I wanted to see for myself whether work in the fields had ceased, and whether oppression had driven my peasants to highway robbery. I found that it was so, and I was stopped by thieves. Their leader was no peasant, but an apothecary. I asked him whether he was driving his trade on the highway and lying in wait for travellers to dose them with purges. The men burst out laughing, and I almost had them : after I had turned my pockets inside out, they let me go my way."

Whatever may have been Rosny's feeling—whether of horror, indignation, or alarm, he remained quite unruffled. But his silence lasted just too long. When the King, who was still pacing to and fro, swung round and eyed him, it was in something of a flurry that Rosny produced his memorandum.

Henri stood rigid, and there was a strange expression on his face, as he looked at the parchments, from which Rosny read and read. When he came to the columns of figures, Henri traced them downwards with his finger—not solely that his eyes and upturned brows might follow them. At last they reached the six thousand workless clothmakers. "You have the total right," said Henri : and as Rosny, stopped, tongue-tied :

"It was revealed to me by a man on the Saint-Michel bridge—a Theology student, who in his need became a clothmaker, but there fared even worse, for six thousand of them were already starving. The Paris dye-works

used to put out six hundred thousand lengths of cloth every year, now they produce no more than a hundred thousand. Have you the figures, Rosny? Ah, here they are. You reckon readily. And I have ready ears, especially when a student, who could get no work as a clothmaker, told me what he knew about this world before taking his plunge into the next. I and you, my friend, are two useful workmen. Our task is to discover how to put these matters right."

"Your Majesty knows," said Rosny, but there was nothing of the courtier in his tone or attitude. "You have a knowledge of affairs, the like of which I cannot boast." However, he did not deter him from setting forth his schemes, first of all in regard to tillage. He insisted that the roads must be cleared of robbers.

"Yes, I assured my apothecary that it would be done."

"Sire, as I have already remarked, what I propose is nothing new. Robbers are also poachers. A few must be hung as a warning to the peasantry, who kill game on the Royal domains."

"And how shall I deal with the noblemen, Monsieur de Rosny, whose horses and hounds trample the peasants' crops?" asked Henri, and cocked his head aside as he waited for the answer.

"Sire! The chase is an ancient privilege of the nobility. Your country noblemen have few others, and they have to provide you with officers."

"We must be just," said Henri; by which he might have been referring to either side. Then, with head erect, he added sternly: "The peasants are ground down under their burdens."

"Look," was Rosny's sole reply; he turned over some sheets, and handed one to the King. Henri paled. "I had no clear notion of this," he murmured. "I am shocked."

"Sire, it is nothing new. But it is a new thing for the country to be ruled by a King who is both wise and bold. What he now must do, he was not afraid to do in his little

kingdom of Navarre in days gone by ; and there was war in those days."

"There shall be no more war," said Henri firmly. "I'll make no war upon my subjects. I would liefer buy my provinces, if I had to go begging in England and in Holland. Rouen and Paris cost me money,—you know how much, and whether I could have gone on paying in such fashion."

"To be sure,"—Rosny nodded ; he glanced round the barren room, which made their enterprisc seem all the more doubtful and precarious.

Henri threw all misgivings aside. "Whatever may be before us, the burdens on the peasants must be relieved by one-third."

Without a word the man of figures pointed to the scheme he had prepared, reducing the taxes on the peasants step by step. Henri read it, and said : "Not quite a third. But scaled down, from year to year. I shall not win my rustics' hearts with that."

Yet one more page seemed then to set itself before his eyes. Here were set forth the local dues, which cut one province off from another and strangled trade. The figures here were the most closely packed. Henri slapped his thigh.

"Here is what I did not know. I'll see to it. Monsieur de Rosny, you are the man for me."

These last words were overheard. The door opened, and the beloved lady entered ; the faithful servant was annoyed, though he bowed profoundly. But Henri hastened to greet her. His grave and careworn look vanished in a moment, and he led her ceremoniously into the room. "Dear lady," said he ; "You were never more welcome."

"Sire, Monsieur de Rosny is the man you need," she repeated. Her writhen smile struck at his heart, though it brought him no less deep a joy.

"He has weighty business with you. I did but want to see your face."

Whereat he replied with gallantry : " Madame, when you appear, every man forgets his business, even Monsieur de Rosny."

" Sire," cried Monsieur de Rosny. " I was about to boast as much, had you given me time. A chair for Madame !" he cried, and promptly fetched one himself. As he came back, he paused, and half turned to go. The King had bent one knee, on the other he had set his lady's foot, and was caressing it. But the astute Rosny realized that of this, too, his approval was desired. He placed the chair, and Gabrielle sat down. The King stood, holding her outstretched hand. And, as though nothing had passed, he proceeded.

" That is what I did not know, Monsieur de Rosny. There can be no steady price for corn so long as the provinces are divided by these tolls. I'll abolish them. In one province there's starvation, and in the next the farmer cannot sell his surplus. I'll abolish them all. It is my will that goods should be carried free throughout my kingdom."

Rosny opened his mouth, but Henri held up a hand : " I know ; how are they to be carried ?—you would say. I'll see to that also. On the high roads and the byroads carriers shall ply from dawn till dusk, with a change of horses every twelve or fifteen miles." He clapped the cover of the document, which Rosny had closed, as though it were now no longer needed.

" It stands written there," said he heartily.

" Sire, it does, but on a later page, which you have not yet read. Your mind is winged ; my clerk's pen crawls."

" What do you think of us, Madame ? " asked Henri. Gabrielle laid a finger of her lovely hand against her cheek, and was silent.

" There's work here for ten years. God knows whether we shall see the end of it," said he, and to the surprise of the other two, he crossed himself. But we will make a start," he cried cheerfully. " This very day, if we had the first few thousand crowns needed."

"Sire, the condition of your finances can be mended," said Monsieur de Rosny in a tone of calm assurance. Henri and Gabrielle both waited for him to go on.

"If Your Majesty has no money, nor even a sufficiency of shirts, the reason lies in the general disorder and irregularity of every sort, incessant waste and embezzlement, and the senseless squandering of revenue." As he continued, his manner gradually lost its wonted calm. "These abuses have slowly wrecked the commerce of your kingdom, and the administration of your treasury ;—they have gone from petty fraud, to the shameless bestowal of the public revenues on powerful persons, whom I can name, and mean to name, and indeed they are here written down." He rapped the cover of his document. "And I will not rest until they have paid the penalty."

Here Gabrielle as well as Henri observed his eyes, which had grown dark and stormy. The oddly neat, fresh colouring of his face was now suffused by an uprush of emotion, that they had never seen in him before. This was a Rosny whom they did not know, but who might well be the real man. Fear came upon Gabrielle ; from this Rosny she could expect no forgiveness. Henri was amazed as he eyed his faithful servant. He realized as he had never done before, the full force of loyalty and faith, and understood that in this human heart they commanded no casual allegiance. They were in fact a passion. The stone knight whom Henri had taken down from the façade of a cathedral, now had come to life, and in good earnest. Why, the man was near to raving. This prodigious honesty might cost him his life ; that was his own affair. But, thought Henri, it might do his King more damage than all the robbers put together. Beware the man of stone !

"My friend," said Henri ; "I am familiar with your loyalty and faith, more so than with all your calculations, and I shall make great use of them in my own and my kingdom's service. You have a task that will last you all the days of your life. You will never get as much money from my Treasury as sticks and stays there."

"I shall," said Rosny respectfully, now quite calm again ; he had recovered his unclouded eyes and girlish cheeks.

"How ?"

"I'll stake my head on it."

He explained no further, but the other two believed him.

"Very well," said Henri. "What have you first in mind, and at whom do you mean to strike?"

"There are many," said Rosny ; "and just those who believe themselves justified in what they do ; the worst abuses are committed in the name of justice. The salt tax is farmed out. Scarce a quarter of it reaches the Treasury. All the rest goes to enrich a few lords and ladies. They have divided the spoils, which even so are not fairly shared. Sire, believe me or not, one of them is the Intendant General of your Finances, Monsieur d'O."

"Just an O, and nothing more," said Henri, with an enigmatic smile and a glance at Gabrielle. "An old young man, all belly, or rather he was all belly. It will have been drained dry by now."

"Have you not heard, Monsieur de Rosny ?" said Gabrielle. "He is dying."

No : this was news to the man of the Arsenal. His days were spent in calculations. But he did not linger over his surprise, he promptly added :

"Let us sequester his property the moment he is dead. When such men die their satellites desert them."

"That will be considered," said Henri, who was resolved to consider it for some while. "Take care, Monsieur de Rosny, that we be not too eager to do the work of others, and Death's work too."

At this, the carved statue from the cathedral, the man from the Arsenal, said no more. Henri let the silence endure. It was Gabrielle's crystal tones that broke it.

"Sire," said Gabrielle d'Estrées. "I ask a favour. In place of him about to die, appoint Monsieur de Rosny."

She said no more, but waited. Monsieur de Rosny was not her friend, as she knew to her regret. But the King had called him his own man ; and at the beginning of the new regime those who bore the weight of it must stand together. They were as yet but three, the three in that bare room. The woman's eyes said plainly to the servant of the King : ' We need each other. Help me, as I'll help you.'

Rosny, quite unmoved, thought : " Nonsense ! You, my pretty lady, will never become Queen. But I shall work and achieve my purpose, however many years ahead."

Henri uttered nothing—but said a great deal. He took his beloved lady's hand and kissed it.

FEVER

The day began devoutly. Henri heard Mass in a church behind the Louvre, the bell of which boomed louder than any in Paris. It had boomed bravely once, when Admiral Coligny—but enough ! The King was praying earnestly, when it was whispered to him that Cardinal Pellevé was dead. He had been President of the Estates assembly, and very active in the cause of Spain. Since the King had seized power he had lain prostrate in a frenzy, he had indeed written :—" The man must be trapped and taken like a beast ! " And now he was dead. Before the King left the church, he commanded that prayers should be offered for the Cardinal. He was near to adding : And for the soul of the Lord Ad—— But not even in his mind did he finish that name.

On the short journey back, his gentlemen took the freedom to reproach him with his mildness and indulgence. A man should take vengeance on his enemies ; it was commonly expected, and he who failed to avenge himself was observed, and held in slight esteem. The King had banished a hundred and forty persons, some from the kingdom, but many only from the capital. Not a single

execution ;—how could he thus inspire respect or fear ? Monsiear de Turenne, a powerful Protestant and probable heir to the Dukedom of Bourbon, a border domain in the East, warned Henri earnestly against traitors ; and with good reason, for he himself was later to betray the King, with several others. Henri answered him, and his Catholics also :

“ If you, and all your like, repeated your Paternoster honestly every day, you would not speak so. I confess that all my victories come from God : I do not deserve them ; but as He forgives me, so must I forgive the errors of my people, and be more gracious and forbearing to them than before.”

The day began devoutly. Moreover, it was a Sunday, bright with the first sunshine of Spring. All work had ceased, except only in the Arsenal. Henri sent to his cousin, the Duchess of Montpensier, to announce that he would wait upon her ; it was then eight o'clock ; he would come at ten. Not that his intention had at first been wholly edifying. He had, at times, thought of the Fury of the League with a rather malicious amusement : she too was probably crying out that he ought to be trapped like a beast. But she confined her tirades to her house. She could no longer display herself upon her balcony to an admiring horde, and incite them to murder the King. She could not use her charms to tempt a villainous little monk to stab the King in the belly. Henri had not forgotten her machinations against the late King.

He foresaw that his visit would be unpopular, and the gentlemen who were to escort him were not informed until the last moment. The King himself was, in fact, a little uneasy ; his friend, the late King, would have shuddered at such an encounter. However, he thought it both charitable and wise to visit the Fury. The House of Guise would never now ascend the throne, and should therefore, like the rest of his subjects, be treated with indulgence and conciliation. But what drew him irresistibly, was his mood of malicious amusement. The former Fury

in her impotence, and terrified, of course, although on the eve of his visit he had conveyed to her that there was nothing to fear—must indeed be a comical spectacle. This decided him to go, and on that very day. He would give himself a Sunday entertainment, but he meant it should be edifying.

The Duchess, though Henri did not know, had in the meantime become half-witted—not openly so, not before the world, nor to those who still frequented her. For them she was the great lady she had always been ; but even before the King entered Paris, there were few who were willing to risk suspicion by consorting with her, and since then none came at all. They disavowed the new master's enemy, and would not be found in her company when she was arrested, which, sooner or later, was to be expected. Some snatched at their victims, others savoured their revenge. No : only those in high favour with the new regime could permit themselves such company.

When the Duchess of Montpensier was told that the King would be with her at ten o'clock, the hour was half past eight. The surprising message had been some time on the way. Madame de Montpensier promptly summoned Madame de Nemours, on whom she felt she could depend. Madame de Nemours was in high favour, she was indeed one of the ladies in whom the King took special pride. Old Catherine de Medici used to call her little prisoner King Wren. Meantime he had grown so great that he had gathered round himself a Court of noble ladies. He stood in sore need of them—thought his enemy. He had no Queen, and his mistress scorned him and betrayed him. The upstart would not dare to lay a hand on Madame de Nemours, who would come and give her countenance. Nor, thought the Duchess, would he in fact dare to lay hands upon her either.

This was her last lucid thought. In her dressing-room she suddenly shrieked for Ambroise Paré, the physician, long since dead. He had once bled her when she lay unconscious for three hours in a frenzy of a hatred that was

not wholly hatred, and racked her for that reason. "Navarre,"—for so she called the King, that she might not call him "France", while her dazed emotions cried out "Henri",—had had the Prior of her little monk torn to pieces by horses: thus avenging the King his predecessor. "Is he there?" she had asked the surgeon when she wakened; she was still bemused, but there was that in her tone, and in her face, that made the old man recoil. So now her women cowered in the corners of the room, as she leapt up and called upon the dead.

Madame de Montpensier's madness was not quite out of her control. She did not commonly confide either in a doctor or her women. She was alone and desolate; the Duke, being in the King's service, avoided her; and the tale of her years was what none could guess. But the man who could stir her to the frenzy that so warmed her heart, was approaching her that day. She dashed about the room, her raven locks, now flecked with white, flying behind her, and her hands clutched to her bared breasts. She was tall, well set, and strong. She paused for an instant at one corner; the woman cowering there, dropped feebly to the floor; all round the room, these shivering creatures peered out from beneath the furniture, as though at a storm from Hell, waiting all the while like damned souls.

The distracted Fury conjured up the dead, whom in her madness she could now see about her: the monk, the Prior, both of them bound upon staves for all eternity, while wild horses tore their limbs asunder. And in her crazy joy she hailed them—"Henri", which roused her to yet more frightful paroxysms. She suffered the torments she inflicted, and without a tremor she submitted to her own dismemberment, as often comes to pass in dreams; though this was a waking dream. When the vision had passed, she found herself on a chair again, exhausted, shivering with cold, and pleading to be stabbed through the heart, wailing the name of him who was to deal that blow. Her women brought her smelling salts; and then she remembered that she had dreamed what she had

often dreamed before. The dream of the dreamer's violent execution is often repeated. Of what came with it and lay behind it, she wisely made no mention.

She bade her women dress her hair, and was so impatient that she struck one of them who was not deft enough. A page, who stood waiting at the door, ran off in terror ; but the Duchess had noticed him and so learned that Madame de Nemours had arrived. "Enough," said she ; "no more paint. I would not appear younger than my years." Her years should be written on her face : it was her best safeguard, not only against imprisonment, but probably against fresh outbreaks. On her way down, she realized that she must take Madame de Nemours into her confidence, if she were to be forearmed. In fact she began by telling her the dream of her execution : which had returned to her that very day.

Madame de Nemours was curious, especially because Madame de Montpensier seemed to her much broken down of late. She enquired the obscurer details of the dream, and whether the King played a part in it. This the Duchess obstinately denied, but her friend, looking into her eyes, did not believe a word. "He dies with you, when you dream. Tell him so. He believes in omens, and for his own sake he will want you to live a long while." But she thought how horrible it was that this woman should still have her mind set on murder, being herself in terror for her life. The King must be warned. At that moment the clock struck ten, and in the anteroom, two rooms away, they could hear his noblemen's arrival.

There the King left them behind, and hastened on alone, past the tall windows, in a shimmer of sunlight ; and his reversed reflection moved with him along the floor. There, at the far end of the rooms sat the two women facing him ; he laid one hand on his hip and thrust his hat back with the other, to get a better view of them. His sleeves as well as his trunk hose were widely puffed at the tops, which gave him a slim appearance. Shoulders thrown back, and a ripple of muscle as he walked—here was a

sturdy, almost boyish figure ; he entered with confident air, and greeted his kinswoman, as though he had returned from a brief absence. Before the ladies could rise, he had sat down beside them, and was soon deep in cheerful talk. There was a flicker of irony in the corners of his eyes ; it was indeed the plainest mark of age about him, for there was sadness in that irony.

He asked solicitously if the ladies were very surprised to see him in Paris, and further, whether they had been robbed of any possessions. No ? They would, indeed, learn from any merchant that everyone had paid for what they had, even the rabble of camp-followers who had come in with the soldiery. "What say to that, Cousin ?"

"Sire," Madame de Montpensier replied, "you are a great and gracious King." And this man kills me in my dreams, she thought, with disillusion in her heart, promising herself that she would never dream again. He thought she was afraid, and teased her a little. Did she really pray for vengeance on Monsieur de Brissac, for surrendering the capital ? Whereat she assured him that she wished that it had been surrendered by her own brother Mayenne. He laughed, and said he would have had to wait too long for that.

In all this interplay of talk, she felt that power was passing into her, and her pride rose up against him, the more familiar he became. Either he knew nothing of what a woman does, and of what she dreams : he was acquainted only with acts of State, all unworthy of the passion that she has squandered and regrets. Or he was bent on her destruction, and he must not be suffered to tease her any more. "Sire," said she coldly, "a conqueror never fulfils expectations."

He did not stop to think. "Otherwise a scaffold would stand before every house," he cried, and was quite taken aback by his own vehemence.

The Duchess sank back upon her chair with eyes closed. Henri stepped back a pace, then further, and would have taken his leave. Madame de Nemours laid a hand upon

his arm. "Can you not see that she is old and ill?" she whispered. Suddenly she seized his hand.

"But you are pale and your hand is burning. You yourself are not well either."

"I am not well," he repeated. "But I can never bring myself to remember that I have enemies elsewhere than on the battlefield."

And Madame de Nemours said in a motherly tone, like a matron admiring an athlete: "It is your enemies that have made you great."

Then he swore his own particular oath that none could understand. "If every man," he cried, "would examine his own heart, he would there find enough to fight. Let me be left to my own task, I have no leisure to be always on the watch for murderers."

But he bethought him that he had not come to talk like this. He raised a shaking hand to his temple, and looked at Madame de Montpensier; she had recovered from her faintness, and her great black eyes were set on him. "Dear Cousin," Henri began, in a familiar tone. "I am feverish, and would beg for a little refreshment. Just a spoonful of conserve."

The Duchess rose without a word and walked to the door. He tried to stop her. "Sire," said Madame de Nemours, "she will not return, she will send her excuses."

But she did return, accompanied by a lackey bearing a dish of apricots; dipped a spoon into it and raised it to her mouth. Henri gripped her hand. "Aunt, pray be careful!" In his alarm he called her Aunt, which in fact she was.

"What?" she answered. "Have I not done enough to be suspected?"

"No one suspects you," said he, swallowing a mouthful. Madame de Nemours stumbled against him in an effort to upset the dish. She thought the fruit might have been poisoned, and paled as she watched the King gulp it down. He wondered if the Fury put anything into it. Well, she

had been ready to take some herself. Too late now. He was in no mood to be afraid. And he went on eating.

"Ah!" said Madame de Montpensier abruptly: "I see why you have such faithful servants." The words were followed by a choking sob. Henri, feeling more cheerful, bade farewell to the two ladies, they had given him a warm hour; and he invited his cousin to the Louvre. When he made his solemn entry into his capital, she must be present. Madame de Nemours asked him when that would be. "When my dear lady has presented me with a son," he said over his shoulder. His face was strangely flushed.

One of the ladies said to the other: "The child is really his."

"There was doubt about it," observed the other.

At midday he scarcely ate, which was quite against his habit; and then he prepared to ride out. Bellegarde was to accompany him, and, among others, a Monsieur de Lionne, handsome, young, and a general favourite for his graceful manners. Monsieur de Lionne possessed the art of so captivating people that they were delighted with themselves, especially women. They felt how much understanding and charm he lavished on them, not merely to give them pleasure, but to make them happy. A truly gallant gentleman, he was never known to do anyone a hurt.

Henri was glad of his company, mainly because he wanted the Grand Master of the Horse, his old crony Feuillermorte, to realize at every turn that there were others more popular than he, and that his best time would soon be past. The fact was that Henri still feared his rival in the favours of the charming Gabrielle—despite of her devotion, which he did not wholly trust, and her condition, which only made her the more feminine.

They rode through the village of Boulogne; the gentlemen had broken off buds of lilac blossom, and leaning down from their saddles bestowed them to the village maids, who laughed but refused to be lifted on to the horses.

Only one took the spray of unopened blossom, laughed no more, and climbed up beside Monsieur de Lionne. "Feuilmorte!" cried Henri. "See what a handsome man can do before his skin turns yellow!"

"Sire, I have long since forgotten those days," said Bellegarde, as they rode out into the open countryside. Here stood a cluster of straw-thatched huts; and before one of them sat a Sunday assemblage of rustics, gathered round a long table of two planks on three upright posts. Glasses were empty, but voices were raised. They were singing, nor did they stop when the gentlemen dismounted. "Hey, fellows!" shouted the King's Grand Master of the Horse. "Come and walk our horses up and down."

They looked round, and several answered gruffly. "We are at home here," said one.

And another: "Until your tax-collectors take the roofs from off our heads."

The King sat unobserved among the group. He swore his own particular oath, that was known about the countryside; some of them looked at him. "Don't let them," he cried; "or they'll have my own roof off me in the end." All were silent, they clasped their gnarled hands together, fist in palm; and their backs and shoulders were the very expression of dumb endurance. Beneath the stained sheepskins of the older men could be seen the shapes of bodies marred by years and years of cramping, straining toil, and a grinding monotony of attitude and movement.

Those who had not turned their heads towards the King, peered at him now and again from the corners of their eyes, and then looked down at their restless hands. And all these rolling eyes and wagging heads gave them the air of a collection of grotesques, or visions of a fevered dream. The King stood up, and sought shade under a walnut tree. Several of his noblemen, among them Monsieur de Bellegarde, joined him, thinking the situation looked a little menacing. Monsieur de Lionne saved it, if indeed it needed to be saved.

He came out of a copse near-by in the company of the

pretty girl who had climbed on to his horse. They had been together in the copse, so much was plain ; but Monsieur de Lionne was leading the young peasant girl by her lifted fingers, as though she had been a lady of the Court ; and thus, with a meaning smile on both their faces, they approached the table, and the youngest man of the assemblage. This youth was still as straight and sturdy as any nobleman, though without the litheness that comes from sword and ball play ; his movements were heavier and a little awkward. His defects appeared when he made a dash at Monsieur de Lionne, who, with a sudden display of iron strength, stopped him without an effort. But he did so with perfect gracefulness and courtesy. He doffed his hat to the peasant lad, who had tumbled backwards on to the bench, and said he had the honour to bring him back his damsel, for he could not bear that any woman should risk an unpleasant encounter on the highway.

All the rustics nodded approval. To the young man, who was still grinning with rage, Monsieur de Lionne suggested a friendly bout of fisticuffs,—and started some preliminary sparring in the air, with a quite irresistible display of gaiety and good humour. This raised a round of laughter ; and Monsieur de Lionne improved the occasion by embracing the young peasant, which the lad suffered him to do. Indeed it was only his awkwardness that prevented him from doing what was expected, and returning the embrace.

Said Henri to his Grand Master of the Horse : “ Feuille-morte, in spite of all I like you best. That is the first quite blameless man I have ever seen. And as I look at him, I feel afraid.”

A peasant, who seemed well on in years, dragged his stiff limbs from the bench, and stood up to address the King. His shoulders were bowed, his arms and his gnarled hands hung down before him, and he had the gloomy visage of a man of sixty, who had never been glad to be alive. “ How old are you ? ” said the King to the peasant.

"Lord," replied the man, "I asked one of your people how old you were ; we are of like age exactly."

"In another matter too we are alike," said the King ; "The toil and trouble of our lives is written on our faces."

The peasant was silent, and blinked before he answered : "That is true."

He pondered, was about to speak, but paused. The King gave him time : with wide eyes and brows uplifted, he waited.

"Follow me, Sire," said the peasant. "Only as far as the brook."

Monsieur de Bellegarde stepped after them, but at a sign from the King he stopped : Henri walked on alone. The peasant led him to a place on the bank where the stream was smooth as a mirror. The King bent down ; his face was burning and he longed to plunge it into the water. Meantime it began to swell, and seemed to be swelling visibly in the reflection, though the King guessed that *this was an illusion, and that the inflammation had attacked him some while before.* Upon the peasant's face there was now a deep and meaning look. "Sire," he said, "Ride back at once to your castle. You shall live or die as God may decide."

"Better for me and for you that I should live," said Henri, with an effort at a laugh. But his face remained rigid ; and of all the experiences of the day that was the worst. At the same moment a sound of snoring came upon his ears, as of a man snoring from a full belly, which annoyed the King yet more. "What is it ?"—"That," explained the peasant, "is the man who eats for six."

Henri did not understand. For the first time he saw a cheerful smile upon the peasant's face. "What !" said he. "You are glad of a man who eats for six, when you yourself have not enough for one !"

By way of answer the man pointed to a grassy mound : behind it rose and fell a mighty belly. The peasant strode across and shook the snorer. "Hey !" he cried. "Hey, you old glutton. Up ! The King wants to look at you !"

It was some while before the man appeared. He was a monstrous sight, with vast limbs and a face like an ogre. There was scarce an inch of forehead between the thick brows and the skull. Mouth and cheeks held space for pounds and pounds of food, and the eyes were closed with fat. The great mass of flesh quivered with lethargy.

"Is it true?" asked the King. "Can you eat for six?" The reply was a grunt.

"He can," said the peasant. "He has devoured all that he possessed, and now we keep him in food. He will eat for six at once. Come, gossip. Show the King what you can do."

The mass set itself in motion, and the grassy sward shook under his mighty strides. The peasants at the long table received him joyfully, some of them even started singing again. But when they heard that the man was ready to eat for six once more, they hurried away to collect such provisions they had in their huts. In a trice the long planks were loaded with hams and bacon and eggs, and the empty glasses vanished behind capacious jugs. Whereupon the gaunt and toilworn figures gathered round the mass of flesh, and thrust him into place at the table. But at a sign from the King, the gentlemen drove the boors away, and Henri faced the glutton.

"And so you devour my peasants. You can eat for six, they say. Do you also work for six?"

The glutton grunted out that he certainly worked, so far as his age and strength permitted. Digestion was a heavy but needful task for a man who had to eat for six.

The King made another sign, and several of his gentlemen set about the mountain of flesh with their riding whips, and lashed him round and round that village green. And he could run when he had to, the great creature. The peasants yelled with laughter, but the King was grimly earnest. His face now deeply flushed and swollen, he told them angrily that his kingdom did not suffice to fill the bellies of such guzzlers. "If I had many such as you," he shouted to the great creature, as he lumbered past under

a shower of blows ; " I would hang you all. Such ruffians would soon starve my kingdom out."

In his fury a sudden chill came upon him ; he began to shiver, which he thought must be due to the rising mist. Before he mounted, he bade the peasants eat the table clear themselves ; but he knew by their faces that they would do nothing of the kind. They would give all they grudged themselves to that devouring monster who was their pride. The King spurred his horse and galloped off. " Do you feel cold, Feuilemorte ? "

" Sire, our feet are numbed by the wet grass."

Most of the gentlemen could not catch their horses at once, and it was not until some while after the King and the Grand Master of the Horse that they rode off. Last of all was Monsieur de Lionne. He waited until all the others had gone. From the cover of the copse he peered round at the peasants ; they were still agape at the King's suggestion that they should eat the food themselves. Monsieur de Lionne lifted the same girl on to his saddle again, and he led his horse for a while, that it might step lightly and with scarce a sound.

Once back in the Louvre Henri had to admit that he was ill. His vision was blurred, and he knew that he would ramble if he tried to talk. So he took to his bed, the doctors did what was needful, and the strain and agitation passed over into lethargy. When it was night, Bellegarde hurried into the room and blurted out frantically :

" Sire ! Monsieur de Lionne——"

" A much too blameless man," whispered Henri. " He makes me afraid."

" With justice, Sire. A little way off the high road he slit a girl's belly, and put his feet into the open body to warm them."

" A fit end to such a day," muttered Henri. He had no longer strength to express his indignation. And he added with an effort :

" Let him be handed over to my magistrates, and publicly quartered."

"Sire ! A nobleman !" cried Bellegarde, somewhat over-loudly for a sick chamber, raising his hands in horror.

"Are you not one ?" said Henri in a toneless voice but with wide open eyes. Bellegarde could not face them, and vanished in the silence.

A little later the sick man received a visit from his sister, Madame Catherine de Bourbon. She had been roused, as the doctors had reported that her brother's condition was dangerous. When she saw his face, she burst into tears, for he did not know her. But the First Chamberlain, Monsieur d'Armagnac, pointed at his master from the foot end of the bed ; Henri's lips were moving. She bent down, guessed rather than heard, and softly joined in the psalm. The day ended as it had begun, devoutly.

THE LOVE OF A NATION

The malady was mastered much more quickly than had been foreseen, in seven and a half days, in fact—for it had been no more than the body's token to the spirit that a turning point had come, and an hour of destiny was at hand. Then, after a month in which to collect his strength, Henri had to take the field again at once. A Spanish army had marched out of the Low Countries, this time under the command of Count Mansfeldt ; but the real leader of these invasions was still Mayenne, of the House of Guise, and he had upon his side most of those who thought as he did. The King was in Paris ; and what struck the minds of everyone was the fact that he was in possession of his capital. City and Province, one after another submitted simply on that account, and many Governors did so for cash down. Remained the great nobles, who made too much profit out of the weakness of the realm, and the distresses of the King and of his people. They were not to be overborne. To their great content the King was still excluded from Communion.

Until the Pope recognized him, which was not likely to be soon, resistance to him was a work of merit.

The King laid siege to the fortress of Laon, and at the same time he fought pitched battles against the invading army sent by that now tainted monarch, Don Philip. They came, and would come again, until ruin overtook them at last. Courage, then ! Never had Henry showed himself so vigorous. Amid all his toils and perils he wrote the liveliest letters to the charming Gabrielle, such as she had never had from him before. She even became suspicious that he loved her just as fondly from a distance ; and she grew jealous of his yearning for her, and of her pictured presentation in his heart. The son, whose birth was imminent, had already been christened Cæsar, for he was a child of war, and indeed of other turbulent events. His father, in his camp, already bore him in his arms, while his mother was still awaiting her hour. These letters brought him so vividly before her, that no thought of disaster so much as entered her mind. Thus she bore him his son ; Cæsar.

When the good news reached him—it was a lovely day of June—Henri had been clambering all night over the hills round Laon, looking for a place whence he could attack the fortress ; he washed the mire from his hands and feet, and rode to his farm in the forest. This he had known from boyhood ; it was one of the outlying domains belonging to his little native land Navarre. There, in days gone by, he had eaten strawberries and cream, and he wanted to savour them again, for he carried a boy's happiness in his heart. Cæsar . . . Cæsar . . . his heart leapt for joy.

After his midday rest he had, as in boyhood, climbed a plum tree, and there they found him. Not far away, other kinds of plums were flying through the air. Enemy cavalry had been sighted, and might well set a most distasteful dish before him. To horse—to horse ! When he arrived before Laon, he was just in time to see his old comrade, Marshal Biron, fall. There he lay ; a lean and

rugged figure he had always been, but now flaccid and defenceless, for death was very near. Henri had an unerring eye for it when a soldier fell ; he knew at once if the last enemy was to be repelled or not. He lifted Biron's head and shoulders from the earth that was so soon to cover him. They looked each other in the eyes, in a last grave salutation of farewell. . . . We were enemies ; hence the bond between us since that day. Do not forget me ; you cannot forget me. Nor you, in the place whither you are to be called. No ; we shall not see each other more : for with what should we see, now that these eyes are crumbling into dust ? Henri watched them intently until they stiffened and broke.

On one and the same day he had acquired Cæsar, and lost Biron. Grievous, indeed, were the turns and changes of life, which must be withstood and endured. The sons must now come forth into their fathers' places, and bring their master aid and comfort. Biron had left a son with the army ; the King sent for him.

" Marshal Biron," said he to the son : from which the latter grasped that he was indeed to take his father's place. He had expected no less, though he thanked the King obsequiously ; and at the sight of Henri's tears, he burst into assiduous lamentations. Tall and muscular he was, rugged like his father, but not lean. The King was to learn his loyalty later on. At the moment he was weeping in a fashion that scarce befitted a strong man of thirty-three—until the King, who began to be disgusted, enlarged on his future duties as Marshal of France. Whereupon Biron the younger promptly came down to business. He supported his claims with every reason that he could readily conceive. " You have enemies," he bade the King reflect ; " I am strong enough to crush a man to death. What if I were against you ! Sire, you may well speak of good fortune ! " Were these the words of a rough soldier ? Or was the soldier craftier than he seemed ?

To the King they expressed no more than the pride of a hearty nature in its fulness of blood and body. When

Biron went on to speak of his powerful kindred, the King indeed conceived this as a warning. It was his mission and his purpose to break up the great families and factions, and strip them of their power, in the interest of the people and the kingdom ; though this was not known to Biron the younger. Henri looked at him ; the bullet head with its thatch of bristly hair reminded him of the peasant that ate for six, an acquaintance that he had made while his fever was upon him ; but, despite its dark brutality, it was the head of a nobleman, and the son of an old comrade. Henri's heart went out to the father as he embraced the son and promised him all he asked.

In July the fortress of Laon submitted to the King, because it could do no otherwise ; but Amiens and several other cities had awaited the occasion, and submitted also. The Spaniards, or what were called such, were again routed, and the King returned to his capital and to the arms of the charming Gabrielle. Near her bed stood a cradle, at the sight of which the King's heart stood still. The King had indeed pictured his son in his mind's eye : here he saw him in the flesh—with a cry of blank astonishment, the father reached hurriedly for a chair ; he felt quite overcome—by joy, of course. And, rightly considered, also because this strong and healthy youngster was his own, and was to secure his future, and his survival beyond his allotted span, both of which had hitherto been unsecured. It was this thought that so moved the King.

As he bent over the cradle, he thought of the toilsome life that lay behind him, without vision of the future—a life that could at any moment have been ended by one bullet. Now all was changed. Henceforth we are two. He said this over to himself, and at last said it aloud, while the mother eyed him patiently ; his joy was born of her, for all that his joy so outran her understanding. And he, as he muttered to himself : “A hearty child : now I am safe,”—and said but little more, there flashed before his mind a panorama of his life, especially of his early

years. The Queen, his mother, had hardened him in boyhood. He himself, the son of a sick woman, had been a far from hearty child ; she had inured him against the weather. This had stood him in good stead, when he had to lie on bare earth in his agelong struggle against his enemies, with his kingdom often as the stake of a battle. Fights and sieges, blood and mire—of what account were they now ? They pass : I stand. And you, my son ?

In the face of his own experience, the father resolved that this lusty offspring of his should have an easy life ; no battling against enemies, but peace and joy, a kingdom established and a loyal people. He, Henri, would make it so, and therewith win his people's love. He lifted the child from the cradle, kissed it, and gave it to its mother to kiss. The first and urgent matter was her divorce from Monsieur de Liancourt ; then his from the Princesse de Valois. The Pope must consent. What if the King of France and the conqueror of Spain threatened to turn Protestant once more ?

The Pope raises his ban, and with his own hand administers communion to the King's envoy. He dissolves the King's marriage, unites him to his beloved lady, and enjoins obedience on all the faithful. All this lay in an uncertain future, but here—in the king's mind, it had as good as happened. For the King had a son, and bore him in his arms ; much would be thus more readily achieved. O the joy and ecstasy of the night that followed—never again did he find it in the arms of the charming Gabrielle.

But the charming Gabrielle must first recover. A petition was addressed to the Ecclesiastical Court at Amiens, to which she and M. de Liancourt were amenable : there the matter was left, until her beauty should be wholly restored, and she made her entry with the King. He must now take possession of his capital, no longer secretly and at an early hour of dawn, but with proper pomp and ceremonial. He indeed felt no inclination to make a show and a spectacle of what he had struggled so bitterly to win. But his dear lady was to make her entrance with

him ; hence all these eager preparations, as the Court did not fail to observe.

There was no protest, and scarce a whisper in the Court and in the city ; both were silenced by the King's bold stroke. So he meant to show himself in his mistress's company to his nobles and his people. Other Courts and nations should be made aware that the King had given his lady a share in his triumph, and had determined to call her to his side. The lovely d'Estrées had taken the first step towards the throne when she bore the King a son. It was recalled that for fifty years past no King of France had proved his manhood. The second step—well, the lovely d'Estrées had already raised her foot to take that too. Truly, they must be very, very cautious, and concert their plans, or they would indeed find themselves with a Queen of their own blood and race.

Such was the general feeling, and it was shared by all—even by Gabrielle herself. She felt uneasy, especially on the day before the entry, which her beloved lord had fixed for September the fifteenth. On the fourteenth, her aunt de Sourdis took care to leave her very little alone. Dame Sourdis dressed her with her own hands in her attire for the morrow : robe and jewels, so splendid and magnificent that none but a princess had ever worn the like.

"No woman of our station was ever so arrayed," said her aunt. To which the niece answered : "I am afraid." And a great jewelled ornament dropped from her fingers.

"Silly goose," said the aunt.

She was rather irritable, for, strange as it might seem, Dame Sourdis found herself pregnant again ; perhaps by her sallow friend Cheverny, but there were others that came into question. The fact was, she begrudged her niece this regal apparel. As she stood beside Gabrielle and looked into the long mirror, she thought her own skin was far more brilliant, and conceived it gleaming against the black silk robe. Richly embroidered, it was cunningly draped over the broad flat panniers, that tipped and swayed

enchantly, and gave most alluring glimpses of the lovely limbs beneath. The lady was convinced that hers also would have graced this masterpiece no less. Through the broad slashed opening in front shimmered a skirt of heavy silver brocade, sewn with intertwining rows of pearls, and great jewelled stars. The aunt gave her niece a hearty slap on the neck. She was only the first of many who would to-morrow flush with desire, or grow pale with envy.

She tried to make Gabrielle more nervous than the lovely creature was already. "You should have looked a little frail when the time came, my beauty," said she. "Such splendours are not to be offered up to curious eyes. It is dangerous, not only for you, but for us all. Monsieur de Rosny will reckon up the expense of this performance. The King's horses have been sent back, for want of fodder. Think on that—and look on this!"

Gabrielle saw through Madame de Sourdis. Despite her distress of mind, she said confidently: "I and Monsieur de Rosny understand each other very well indeed. He helps me, and I help him." And although her aunt persisted in her warnings, Gabrielle resolved that she would that very evening induce the King to appoint Monsieur de Rosny to the Treasury.

That same evening, however, the King and Gabrielle slipped out privily and got into a coach, the very names of the travellers being kept a secret. They went no further than Saint-Germain. As they arrived, the old castle stood up black in the fires of sunset. The previous Court had once lived here, and that same vision of dark conflagration had met the eyes of a small boy: he had travelled thither with his mother Jeanne from a very distant land. Thence was to start the great procession on the morrow into the capital. "Your hand, Madam; we are at home. And everywhere we set our foot, we shall be at home."

This he said as they alighted from the coach, for he was well aware that she felt uneasy. It was the first royal castle in which she was to sleep. She was indeed uneasy:

she shared the common view that she was being overbold. The common view of kingship is based on superstition ; it was, and would ever be, a grievance against Henri that his was different. He tried to soothe her, and laid his two hands round the lovely, girlish brow of her who had borne him his son. But Gabrielle closed her eyes, she trembled yet more violently, and with eyes still closed she begged that he would leave her alone that night.

From this he might have learned much ; but then he made his solemn entry, and all seemed well. It was evening, the light from the torches flickered through the narrow streets, over the thronging crowds, and up to the decorated houses. People were still clinging to gables and beams ; from below and from above came shouts of "Long live the King ! Long live the King !" ; and there he was, on his dapple-grey, in a doublet of grey silk, stiff with gold embroidery. This time he wore his white-plumed hat, for there was peace ; nation and King were united.

He had indeed the entire garrisons of Nantes and Saint-Denis around him and before him, together with the city fathers and the justices, who might well serve as hostages ; so peace there must needs be, and—Long live the King ! In other days a cheering crowd had surged round another horse, on which sat a fair-haired horseman, in silver armour, with nothing in his heart but death. Slaughter, treason, years of fanatic disorder, until the hero of that city fell at last ; murdered. Let us think no more of him who was Duke of Guise ; our people's love this day would seem a little tepid, by comparison, and might make us sad. We serve with an uplifted heart ; for the service that would win a people's love must surely be so given.

In place of a murderous favourite of the masses, here, before the public gaze, passes the loveliest woman that this world will ever see. Her litter came first, before the King, his troops and noblemen, and the city councillors and dignitaries : a short space ahead, drawn by two mules in red harness, and escorted by a company of musketeers. The red damask curtains were thrown back ; all who

wished could look their fill on that shy, appealing smile. She is not proud, said some. She has borne the King a son. How can she be the Hell-cat against whom we have been warned? And others answered: She is far too richly clothed. Look at the women's faces. What must she be to face all bitter envy? But she does so, came the answer; by the King's will. She is his glory, his pride, and his honour.

Such was the talk among the jurists of his parliament, while he and the whole procession filed onwards to the Cathedral of Notre-Dame. He had a word for all who cheered him, and for all who pushed forward to get a sight of him and his lady. His white-plumed hat was oftener in his hand than on his head. Three very lovely women in mourning stood at a window; to them he bowed profoundly. His Humanists, awaiting him in the paved forecourt of the cathedral, said: "Well, he led us to victory, and our time has come." But they noticed that they had in the meanwhile grown grey, as had their King. And they added: "Power and possession come late, that they may be the better used." Whereupon they sallied out to meet him, more than a hundred of them, in red robes.

After the *Te Deum*, the same procession was again formed, but did not draw such a throng of spectators as before; it was eight o'clock, and high time to get back to supper. The King reached the Louvre almost alone. The crowd had all drifted homewards. When he sat down to his own supper, he shivered. The old palace was very cold. His dear lady's presence might have brought some warmth into it. But after a public ceremony, the first in which Gabrielle had taken part, they could scarcely spend the evening together. Was she too shivering in her house? Both of them were lonely; what might she be thinking of that solemn entry under the eyes of the Paris populace?

He wished they could be talking over the events of the day: had all gone well, and if not, why not? She was as quick as he at divining the minds of those about her. It was

their gift to feel in their very backs what their people thought—just there, indeed, when they had passed, and the cheering had died down. Henri reflected : well, he had done what in him lay ; his horse had duly curvetted when he greeted the three mourning women. He had not sat his horse like a Spanish potentate, nor had he ridden like a cavalry captain. The three women had responded very graciously. But surely—surely the sight of his dear lady must have moved them all to tears of joy, women as well as men.

“ Was she not lovely ? ” he said softly to himself, without looking round to see which of his noblemen was serving him. It was, in fact, brave Crillon, a man scarred by a thousand fights, and one of his most devoted followers. He distinguished himself before Laon, and had asked in recompense that he might fill the King’s glass that evening. This he did, and answered :

“ Yes, Sire, she was too lovely.”

Henri turned his head ; “ Brave Crillon, sit down beside me.”

The other gentlemen took this as a hint to withdraw. “ Now tell me, what have you against her ? ”

“ Sire, I worship her,” replied the soldier promptly. “ Because I serve you, I honour her whom you love, and trouble my head no further. But the people, being what they are, objected to the kerchief in her hand ; it must have cost twenty crowns to embroider it. But what if it cost a hundred ! She is my King’s beloved.”

“ A glass with me, brave Crillon. And what else ? ”

“ Sire, many things ; and mostly nonsense.”

“ Out with it.”

“ I am but an old soldier, I go about among the people unobserved, and I hear them say that you have increased your lady’s allowance from four to five hundred *talers* a month, and bought her an estate, while you yourself are deeply in debt. It makes no odds to me. Where there are soldiers, there will be usurers. To provide Your Majesty with money, you have Gondi and Zamet, foreign rogues

who bleed you—so the people say. Hence you have to tax your own people ; so they say. And tax them unjustly,—so they maintain.”

And Henri said—this time not for the ears of Crillon, whose glass he had filled and refilled several times :

“ Poor folk. So they are still angry with me. They cannot see that I make life no harder for them. I do my best to help them. But they’ll love me when I have put in hand the plans of my schemer in the Arsenal.”

The soldier caught the word “ Arsenal ” and growled : “ He of the Arsenal is held to be the worst of all. How can a soldier deal with matters of finance ? ”

“ Is that all ? ” said Henri to his comrade in arms. The scars on Crillon’s forehead and cheeks reddened—not from the wine he had drunk, for he could stand far more than that ; indeed it helped him to utter what would have otherwise stuck in his throat.

“ Sire ! ” said brave Crillon, “ if you had but remained a Huguenot ! ”

“ You, at least, liked me as a heretic.” Henri clapped him on the shoulder, and laughed.

“ For my part, you might be the Grand Turk if you pleased.” The soldier went on in an embarrassed undertone : “ I think you neither traitor nor hypocrite ; but the priests in their pulpits call you so, and the monks, that go in and out of every house. The people mostly believe that you have no religion at all.”

In a still lower tone, Henri muttered over his glass :

“ I often think so myself. How can I tell ? ”

“ The opinion is,” pursued brave Crillon, “ that you were converted solely for your advantage, to get the Pope’s recognition. And he is to dissolve your marriage, that you may marry your lady.”

Here Henri rapped out an oath. “ And I shall do it.”

“ Yes. If he consents. And we must see you humiliate yourself before the Pope. Our King was not wont to bow to any man.”

Henri : “ He is God’s representative.”

Brave Crillon : " And who is God ? A God of monks, who go about whispering that you are Antichrist : that your fate has long awaited you, and will overtake you in the end."

Henri : " Is that what is said ? "

He knew very well that it was ; but had not believed that the time was ripe for a faithful servant to report the matter.

Then the old warrior burst out savagely :

" Sire ! Divorced or not, you should have married your lady, and made a solemn entry with your Queen. If the people want to see Antichrist, show them Antichrist. Never fear ; they would have cowered. And thus, not the King, but the Pope of Rome, would have been humbled, once and for all, and would have done your will, he and his priests and monks, and the whole rabble of them all. Amen."

" Brave Crillon, it is time we went to bed," said Henri decisively.

AN EXECUTION

The King discovered the plans of an architect since dead, and thereby enlarged his palace of the Louvre while he lived in it. Gradually he collected two thousand workmen, who filled the whole building with their uproar. He was indeed often away on a journey while the works proceeded : these journeys being, in fact, campaigns.

He covered the southern garden front with ornamental traceries of H and G intertwined. He also began the great gallery from the Louvre to the Tuileries, and enriched the end façade. As the years went on he was to carry the outer wall of the palace past the wing named after the Goddess Flora, and back again to the Tuileries façade. By the time it was all done, his life would also be at its term. And so, all his days, he lived in an atmosphere of incompleteness and unrest, of zestful labours, and anxiety over what it was all to cost.

He began on his own dwelling, but it was not long before much else, and the very realm itself, were being reconstructed. And this was closely marked, and with uncertain feelings. What profits the community always breeds the mistrust that far outruns gratitude. When a few persons must lose something—their excess of power, money, property, or influence, the process of change always figures as a public calamity. There are those who make sure of that. The great lords, displaced by this monarch from their privileges, had of course, each and all of them, hordes of dependants. Every one of these lived at the charges of the people, like the hulking creature whom Henri had seen while the fever was upon him; the man who ate for six, while the starving peasants knew no otherwise.

Rosny, who was to become Duke of Sully, at long last—the King had been in no hurry, for this cathedral image had been his best servant, and made him the most enemies—Monsieur de Rosny, then, was finally put in charge of the Treasury. It was Gabrielle d'Estrées who got him appointed, as the King himself made known to Monsieur de Rosny. Hence a certain indulgence and an averted eye on the Treasurer's part in respect of the financial needs of his loyal mistress and her numerous family.

The Royal Treasurer, Monsieur de Rosny, as he had promised, set about his task with all his might. At his instance, the King allowed him to inspect all the finance offices throughout the Kingdom—despite the protests of the older members of the Treasury Board. Hence much malignancy, and the first establishment of real control. There was not an office which Rosny did not force to disgorge, after exposing all manner of peculation, and stopping the brutal waste of revenue—this, when need be, by force. For the Royal Counsellor came with armed escort, and could promptly retransform himself into a soldier. Moreover he was a Protestant, and obstinately remained so, thus enabling all the stripped plunderers to cry out that the Religion was in danger. This was

dinned into the country folk on every side. They ploughed their land once more, but did not pay over their earnings to the appointed officers : which (they were told) was a sin. They fed their flocks as they had not done for many a year, without fear of seizures and sales ; and the roads were free, all customs dues had been abolished. The Provincial Court, that had imposed such dues, was now no more. All of which was due to force, and force applied by two heretics. Let them take heed for their salvation !

This they did, and actually rose in revolt ; against the evidence of their own eyes they believed themselves yet worse oppressed. Such is the power of rumour, trickling incessantly through the minds of men, like runnels through the fields. And rumour had it that under cover of the professed heretic Rosny, another, half-converted, and now called King, was planning to destroy the Religion ; and was in fact Antichrist.

King Henri laughed. He was no better off either, and were he a peasant, he would assuredly revolt. However, he was pressed by many well-intentioned persons to keep Rosny in hand. And indeed he was secretly tempted to pension him off ; but he thought of the man's steadfastness, that he himself so sorely lacked ; with advancing age it grew more rigid, and as time passed more dangerous. However, he lavished rewards on Rosny because he took no bribes. These noble plunderers' money, Rosny despised on principle ; but he gladly let his master compensate him for his honesty. Those little bags, that were the guerdon of his faithful service, he collected as calmly as in days gone by, when conquered towns were still sacked, and he drew his share. He had some reverses, and advised his King to hang a great lord, instead of using peaceful means to remove him from his Province. "Blockhead !" said Henri promptly. "It would cost me much more to make war on one of my subjects than to buy him."

Doubt and suspicion ; these were the harvest that the King reaped, apart from the cash results of Rosny's journeys.

It was much the same over the shops in the Louvre. On the level of the street he installed shops, in which craftsmen as well as artists worked, for he made no distinction between them. He wanted his own people and travellers from other lands to see with good advantage how the industries of his country were beginning to thrive. And he began to lay out the *Place Royale* in his capital : long colonnades round a great central pool, for the display of the King's especial pride, the silk industry, which he had created and did his utmost to encourage.

But his *Place Royale* was first used by those that came after him, and only for display of out-moded pageantry, not in the service of industry. So the scheme failed, because the King's utmost energy did not suffice for all the tasks that he had to accomplish single-handed within the short time that was to be his. Moreover the citizens distrusted these innovations, as did the country folk ; and they too concluded from them, that the King must be an opponent of the Religion. Burghers and their families visited the upturned sites, which they had long regarded as their own peculiar property. What they saw displeased them ; they stood about in little groups, and muttered that the King could be no true Catholic. It was well known to be an ordinance of God that dwellers in cities should work in cramped conditions. Airy spaces, colonnades girdling a pool of water—these were for the gentry. There let them hold their wrestling matches and their jousts, as they had always done with Heaven's approval.

And it would be so again, no doubt of that. King Henri had aroused scandal enough with the shops that he had actually installed and fitted up in the Louvre. The clatter of craft-work, the serving of customers, the bustling throng in working clothes ; all this under the same roof as Majesty ! How could such abominations be permitted ? True, the King was building. True, his first step had been to get the gardener Lenôtre to lay out vast flower-beds, and avenues of tall clipped hedges. He squandered on outlandish trees all the revenues that his Treasurer, Rosny,

extracted from his people ; on stone-pines, and orange-bushes and sycamores ; then he enclosed that garden, and walked alone among his green pavilions. That indeed was regal. What they did not like was his habit of haunting shops, and interfering in the common course of life. There must inevitably be incidents ; a King must not be involved in such matters, least of all a King whose position was so very insecure.

One day, in a stonemason's shop, a woman had a fit. Many saw it ; the seizure came upon her at the sight of a cross upheld by a carved stone image of a saint. The devil that had entered into her could not endure it, and struggled to come forth. A priest was summoned, uttered over the poor possessed creature all the exorcisms enjoined upon such occasions, and the evil spirit would have certainly been expelled. The woman fell into frightful paroxysms, and her shrieks were the shrieks of demons. Came the King with his guard ; " What is this ? " he cried, and slapped the devil smartly in the face. All saw it : the blow brought forth a fearful face from hell, foaming at the lips, and the woman nearly choked. Meanwhile, a doctor appeared, summoned by the King. He slit the veins of the writhing creature, as though such a thing were lawful. He half unclothed her, swathed her head and shoulders in towels dipped in cold water ; at which moment a procession happened to pass, carrying the Host, and although the woman could see nothing from her wrappings of damp linen, she howled more horribly than ever.

The King had not done well. He left the shop amid the hostile silence of the crowd. Fortunately he was escorted by his guard. The maltreatment of the maniac, who did indeed get up and go her ways, was not forgiven for some while. Such a cure was most improper. The shops in the Louvre, the *Place Royale* and much else, the bridges that combined the various parts of Paris into a single city—all this too was most improper. The King pardoned everyone—he pardoned his enemies of the

League, who would have had him hanged, the great lords, whom he could have hanged, instead of coming to terms with them. He let the peasants go, although their distress had lately driven them to banditry ; nor was anything done to the Protestants, his former companions in the faith. There had been no execution in Paris since the entry of this King, and that did not please the people at all. As yet.

One day, however, on the *Place de la Grève*, the familiar preparations, so beloved of the populace, were put in hand ; the executioner's men set up the scaffold, they greased the wheel, to make it turn more smoothly while the headsman broke the condemned man's limbs. And—that nothing might be lacking—four black horses stood by to tear him asunder. The houses, broader above than below, looked down curiously from their gables to see what might be going to happen. The excited populace stood with eyes and noses peering out from beneath their tall felt hats and square fringed hair. They had not yet believed it true, though they could hear the tolling of the execution bell. But the improbable did happen : a nobleman appeared, surrounded by an escort of soldiers.

He walked on unhindered, for a free passage opened out before him as the crowd fell back : he walked gracefully, not with too hurried nor too slow a step, and he held his handsome, youthful head erect. The women looked long at him, and he met their eyes with a soft appealing gaze that seemed incredible from a man facing such a death, who had done what he had done. The women on whom his eyes fell felt a throbbing at their hearts—they knew not whether from horror, or grief at his fate. Two buxom women in their middle years began a vociferous protest, and others promptly raised their voices. So likely a youth must not be twisted on the wheel : nor could one so engaging have committed any crime, least of all the abominations for which he was to be quartered.

Some few men were cursed by their wives as cowards,

and there was much hoarse muttering against the Court and the King himself. Then a ripple stirred the crowd, which began to surge and thrust towards the scaffold. And indeed those in front and beside it might almost have wrested Monsieur de Lionne from the soldiers, before he could be delivered to the headsman. Indeed the soldiers only kept them off because the headsman was on his knees in prayer. It was believed that the instrument of retribution recoiled from it himself; a messenger from the King would soon appear with an order of release. Instead of which, the executioner's men seized the victim, and at that moment a young peasant was suddenly seen standing on the steps of the platform, who spoke amid an awed silence, and in a voice that quavered with hatred and fury: "It was my betrothed. He put his feet into her open body."

At this, several women screamed, in the same tone as the now busily pealing bell. They had known this, but would not believe it as they watched the young man's graceful movements. But now he could move no longer, he was bound fast, his arms outstretched behind his head, his legs from the knees downwards dangling over the greased wheel—and there were other witnesses that followed the young peasant. It was now whispered among the crowd in accents of fear and horror and wrath, that the youth had often committed the same abomination, more especially on his own domain. Only from dread of his position and influence had he never been formally arraigned. The officials were too fearful to proceed, and the peasants were paralysed by their agelong slavery.

Was it conceivable? Was the face of justice changed? The crowd craned their necks and peered into the distance: no messenger of rescue yet—the executioner swung the wheel, and brandished his iron staff. Then a sigh swept over the whole square. And in that sigh the vast array of people on the *Place de la Grève* in Paris disburdened their united hearts. So it had really happened; a gentleman was put to death according to the common law for

thieves and murderers. Not beheaded with a sword like his equals, nor in penalty for an attempt against His Majesty. But broken on the wheel, and quartered, in retribution for his crimes against poor people. A man who had been muttering at his wife's behest, flushed fiery red, and cried out frantically : " Long live the King ! "

The voice of the people, this time in his favour, did not reach Henri in that hour. He paced the green pavilions of his enclosed garden, racked by the hope that the man had understood. The pealing of the little bell betokened the beginning of the execution ; he stopped and wiped his brow. And this or something like it was in his mind—There are madmen of all kinds. Some whose reason has been wrecked by hate, or even by love. They kill for things of this world and the next, for Heaven, which they hope to reach, and for women whom they desire. Heaven, and women—both give us life, and on account of both, we kill. Many become prophets, like the preachers who write to me and foretell my death. Many make magic on a wax bust of me, thinking to kill me by such means. I recall my fever, my aunt Montpensier, and the man who ate for six ; I remember Monsieur d'Estrées, who stole from mere foolery, or Brissac the catcher of flies, Parma, the General without a purpose, and Mayenne, who could never learn a lesson : what, too, of my cool, complacent Rosny, who respects money as he does his own honour ? —God help me, I have to deal with madmen. Their empty claims, their treacherous deeds, their thirst for blood, and I must endure much more of it all before I die. If they get me in the end—if they get me, then they will see what they have never seen, for they never knew how mad they were.

The Poor Sinners' Bell tolled a last time, and was silent. Henri bent his head and prayed fervently for Monsieur de Lionne. . . . Be merciful to him, Oh Lord. He loved women overmuch. . . . But in his own mind, he clasped not merely the knees of the Lord, but those of his dear lady : she must preserve him from excess ; from shame

and humiliation. An ever present menace, for man's reason sways pitifully between bottomless abysses. With you is peace : with you is refuge.

BESIDE THE CRADLE

The Jesuits wanted to provide him with a confessor, but he put them off. None the less he felt that they would grow more dangerous to him the longer he evaded them. But he could not carry humiliation any further ; that would disgust Frenchmen of both creeds. To play the faithful son and poor petitioner of Rome, and still to be spurned—which, thought Henri, was no more than he deserved, and cursed to think so ; but only Monsieur d'Armagnac heard those curses. He scarce dared to miss a Mass, however urgent was his business. He tried to excuse himself. " I am working for the public weal, instead of hearing Mass. But I approach God elsewhere, as I think,"—but the pretext was barely admitted by the Prelates, who were the most accommodating of the kind.

The fresh and vigorous cohorts of the Jesuits admitted nothing and forgot nothing. The Court loathed them, and the Parliament of Paris indicted them, because these Fathers did not, as was then customary in Europe, regard the majesty of Kings as divine—far from it. Henri, who alone shared their opinion on this matter, secured a very clement judgment to that suit, which by no means placated the Fathers. They conceived clemency and toleration on the part of their enemies as a crime, and indeed as the only one they must not commit. The case of the King of France was canvassed by them in his own country, as in Spain. Their polemical books were enlarged by several chapters in those days—but the conclusion, and the ultimate exhortation, was invariably that tyrants must be murdered.

His own spiritual forces, his Huguenots—Henri kept in reserve, whether or not he might need them in the

future. In the Louvre there were hidden certain packed coffers—to be kept ready to hand until the end of that reign. By God's grace neither the coffers nor the Huguenots would be needed ; the latter indeed were well disposed to leave the way of it to destiny. A King and father of his people knows no favourites, none may stand near to his heart. Those who have worked for the last hour only in the vineyard shall be rewarded as highly as the first. And indeed Henri dealt with his first comers more strictly than with those who came afterwards.

It was not long before Philip Mornay heard a voice within him say that he would henceforward be an embarrassment to his King. He had never been allowed to report on his mission to England, as he used to do, in private audience. He handed the King a memorandum assuring him of Elizabeth's unalterable friendship. Shortly afterwards, she recalled all her auxiliary troops from France. Then Mornay withdrew in silence to his town of Saumur : he had been its Governor since the previous reign. And he fortified that town beside the Loire. He fell to writing theological works, as his habit was—in his leisure : and from this safe seclusion he sent the King the completed plan for the Gallic State Church. Added thereto were asseverances that he was, as he had always been, the King's devoted servant. He certainly regarded the King's change of faith as a brief darkening of the prospect. But he fortified himself in Saumur, and evaded the King's appeals that he should come to Paris. At last he went : his suspicions vanquished by his ancient affection.

Turenne, the other great Protestant, never again, of his own will, put himself within reach of the King ; he had to be secured later by a ruse of the admirable Rosny, who was made a duke for the achievement. When Turenne inherited the small estate of Bouillon, he did not merely fortify himself, as Mornay had done in Saumur ; he played at independence, after the fashion of certain nobles who did likewise elsewhere. King Henri was to encounter Protestant rebels, beside those to whom he was so well accus-

tomed. Not a few of the Religion, who were too weak to rebel, heard how he was said to have insulted one of them. A doctor had become a Catholic ; " Ah," jeered the King to some Protestant courtiers : " Your Religion must be very sick, the doctors are giving it up."

He jested at their expense, and longed that they might guess his deeper meaning ; but that they could not. Least of all did they undersand that he held them in reserve—not for the battle, which God forbend ; he would have been content to leave that in their hands. But Henri's object was to put his old creed on a level with that of the majority, both in public law, and in general estimation. This would take time ; his first steps were to flatter the Pope, keep the Jesuits at a distance, deal strictly with his friends, and not disdain a jest upon occasion. His aim was clear before him, no other saw it, and he himself could say no word of what it was. When he had at last established " the Religion " in his kingdom and set it wholly free, this would be his quittance, and the climax of his reign. But he must have grown very great before he could achieve it.

The excellent Rosny, what did he know, after all ? Or Agrippa, who loved him more than any man ? Rosny had dedicated himself to the State, and hence to the King. He was a man of stone ; anyone who stood in the way of the King's advancement must be removed, even the beloved Gabrielle : in that purpose he was rigid, though he would wink an eye upon occasion. Still less was this admirable servant concerned with the destinies of his own brothers in the faith. Each according to his deserts. He himself stood firm, cuirassed in steel ; he had himself painted in armour, and hung the portrait in the Arsenal, where he made his calculations and drew his decrees. His own career had been full of knightly adventure, indeed it would have provided matter for a romance—which Rosny would certainly never write ; he was busy collecting material for his book on the trade and industry of the Kingdom. Away with romance,—though Rosny could

never have been anything but sedate under the most romantic circumstances.

Agrippa was still romantic, for such was the essence of the man. Monsieur d'Aubigné once came to violent odds with Monsieur de Rosny, after the manner of old friends, who are convinced that neither will ever betray the other, and so speak their minds when they fall out. "Not a word," proclaimed Agrippa; "against the beautiful and charming lady who so inspires the King. But for this beloved lady we should never have seen his genius unfold and come to fulness. Nor should we ourselves have made much of life, and you especially, Monsieur de Rosny, would have remained the mediocre officer—that you really are" added Agrippa aside.

"Very well," said Rosny, in a cold fury. "Meantime, the beloved lady is betraying the King with Monsieur de Bellegarde, and the King's son is his."

"Draw, Sir!" cried the fiery little man. His enemy stared scornfully down at him with blue enamel eyes.

"Before I run you through," observed Monsieur de Rosny; "pray give me a brief description of the beautiful and charming object of dispute, in verse, which will certainly be mediocre—like yourself, both as officer and poet," he too interjected.

Agrippa was too proud to defend his talent. Writing poetry and fighting—one did not talk of such matters. But he said—and so swelled in stature that he seemed now to look down upon the other—"There is someone who has been privily handing lampoons to the King. I would not care to be that man."

"What nonsense is this?" said Rosny, in a tone not of question but contempt. He had firm ideas of his duties. This ruffling, penniless poet, Agrippa, had never been conscious of any reality; duty, for Rosny, was no more than a firm grasp upon facts.

"Your business," Rosny went on, "is with words, no matter what their sense, if they do but sound agreeably. I think you had better not appear before His Majesty;

you have been babbling. By your account, this beloved lady is the cause of the people's distresses. She is, indeed, richer than you. The same charges are made in the lampoons, and a man who knows his duty must give them to the King, instead of jesting behind his back in such fashion."

Agrippa had heard one thing only: "I must not appear before the King? I?"

"Or your days are numbered. He will kill you; he has said it."

Agrippa dashed out, mounted his horse, and rode at a gallop to the Louvre. Henri was just entering the palace.

"Sire! Pray keep your word and kill me."

By way of answer, Henri embraced his old friend. Clapsed in each other's arms they hid their tears. The King took him to the house of Gabrielle nearby. She herself was not within; Henri took Cæsar from his cradle, and laid him in Monsieur d'Aubigné's arms.

"Sire, your very image," said the worthy man, despite the evidence of his eyes, for the child was fat, fair-haired, light-eyed, and took after his mother in every way.

"You see," said Henri. "He is mine, and I shall call him Cæsar."

"A proud name," said Agrippa. "The great Julius Cæsar abolished rank and class within his empire; all men were at a level, far beneath the sovereign. He united the nations round the Middle Sea. Which means, for nations, that they obey one single ruler."

"And for that very reason are no longer slaves," said Henri promptly. Then he went on:

"Look at those little shining eyes,—so innocent of what is to come. You know what scandal is talked about his parenthood? What shall I do?"

And the excellent Agrippa answered briskly:

"Sir, laugh at the rumours and lampoons; and also at the silly jokes of a poor old fellow whose pension does not meet his needs."

"I'll raise it—yet once more." Henri took Cæsar

back into his arms. "But laugh I can and will; why, this very day a preacher denounced me from the pulpit for whispering into my mistress's ear."

"During the sermon?" said Agrippa: and answered his own question. "The King may do it," he exclaimed, "He should ride through Paris with her, take her on his hunting parties, and be advised by her rather than by a scurvy fellow called Monsieur de Rosny."

Henri: "Leave Rosny alone. The Graces think but little of him: but he stands well with the goddess Minerva, not to mention Mercury. I asked your counsel in trouble that was not brought on me by Gabrielle—far from it!" Came the oath that he had made his own. "It is her aunt de Sourdis who is poisoning my days just now—God confound her!"

"Why?" asked Agrippa innocently, but with an elfish glitter in his eye.

"Must I tell you? She has taken it into her head to become a mother. What example does not do, she could leave undone no longer."

The excellent Agrippa was indeed moved by pity for his master's quandary. "Say no more, Sire. I know all. The niece will hold the aunt's son at baptism, and you are to stand godfather."

"I have promised on my honour," Henri confessed.

Agrippa: "Declare a war, that will get you out of it."

Henri: "No, but seriously—what do you think?"

Agrippa: "What I think is that I don't know whether you mean to marry Madame d'Estrées, or de Liancourt, or the Marquise de Monceaux, and make her our Queen."

Henri: "I shall do so."

He strode to the far end of the room, and Agrippa to the opposite end. From whence Agrippa ventured: "And Monsieur de Rosny? He is in treaty for three Princesses at once. Will you marry them all, and your lady as well?"

"Let Rosny do as he thinks fit," said Henri over his shoulder, "My hour will come."

Agrippa, still from his distance : "Your beautiful and charming lady is the worthiest to rule us. She is of our kind, though raised above us by your love. So shall it be. I see it in my prophetic spirit. The Court and the people will open their eyes very wide when these things come about."

"Give me your hand," said Henri ; he had heard what he wanted to hear. He stepped into the centre of the room, where Agrippa met him and stood a while bent low over his master's hand. He felt ill at ease, his conscience smote him, he doubted his own advice, as also the King's resolve. Henri said under his breath :

"Then I can please the old aunt by standing godfather."

Agrippa raised his head, but did not otherwise move. "That is the least you can do," he murmured in a bantering tone lest he might betray his uneasiness.

A MYSTIC

The christening of the little Sourdis—or whatever he might be—took place in the old church where a great bell often boomed ; and it was a most magnificent affair. The streets were packed with spectators, who found much to astonish them, and much, too, they could not understand. The King made a noble figure as godfather, and his lady, who stood godmother, was almost bowed down beneath her weight of jewellery. The greatest ladies of the kingdom served her as maids of honour, a great noble carried the salt-cellar, another the ewer, and the infant lay in the arms of a Marshal's lady. He was fat and large ; when the godmother held him over the font, she nearly dropped him. A witty Court dame observed that what made him so heavy were the royal seals attached to his behind.

This was a hint that the real father was the Chancellor, Cheverny, the bearer of the ewer. Others named the child's own uncle as its begetter, who was no other than the

officiating Bishop. Good folks !—what a state of affairs ! The Court took the matter lightly ; but mere observers were less inclined to jest. Outside, upon the street, there was evil talk, and all of it centred on the King.

The sovereign—God hath set him over us, we bow down before him, and he who has kissed the royal knees dares put no food between his lips that day. The awe of majesty is inured within the person of the ruler. Everyone knew that—did he not know it too ? He engaged his sacred person in abominable affairs of this kind. Himself—alas !—an adulterer, with the adulteress whom he meant to make his consort, he held strange bastards over the font. And he actually caressed his mistress as he did so—those inside the church saw it all : but outside, where his demeanour could not be actually seen, the performance was regarded as utter profanation of a sacrament and of the King's majesty.

A young man, soberly and decently clad in black, babbled distractedly as he stood among the crowd. He was unconscious of doing so, and when he sometimes caught the sound of his own voice, he cast furtive looks around him. His face was grey and blotched, there were pallid crescents underneath his eyes, and his eyelashes were quivering. "Aha !" said he to himself. "Fear not. Commit the sin of the flesh during the sacred office. I can see you, though I stand without : and I know how it is done. King—you will not confess it ; I, too, keep my secret, and carry in my poor soul, wherever I go or stand, eternal damnation."

"Now you have betrayed yourself," whispered a voice behind him. The man swung round as he heard that menacing voice and peered into the crowd : but he could not meet the eyes that held his own.

"At last," he groaned. "I could have borne it no longer ; take me away with you."

"Follow me," said the Unknown. But he did not lead that sober-looking citizen to any guard-post ; he took him to the Convent by the church where that unholy baptism

was taking place. They were admitted, the door clanged behind them, the chain clashed, and they entered an empty room. The Unknown secured the door. The window was set high in the wall, and barred. Dusk was falling, and the pallid youth was so placed that the fading daylight outlined his face and hands against the darkness. The Unknown gave him but a single sign, and the tormented creature began to speak, twisting his fingers as he told his tale.

"My name is Jean Chastel. My father, Pierre Chastel, is a cloth-merchant, with a shop opposite the Court-house. I was educated by the Jesuits, and am now a law student. I have led a vile life, from boyhood upwards ; otherwise, I am not known," he shuddered, and then groaned.

Sternly his interrogator answered : "Poor worm ! You pride yourself on hiding your abominable sins. You twitch and writhe and turn up your eyes and gasp, in foul enjoyment of what you are and have been. God made you, and we will now see for what purpose. You have never confessed the abominations of which you boast, thinking that your teachers have never heard of them."

"Alas ! They have not," muttered the other hoarsely. None the less, he had a foreboding that judgment was to be pronounced. It was this fear that had driven him from one unnatural act to the next. Never had he confessed, and his wickedness was now more than he could bear.

"I have never confessed," he whispered. "In the act of confession I have always concealed the mortal sin. Too late : no priest will now absolve me ; the Holy Wafer will never pass my lips. Were I a murderer, I would make an attempt on the King !"

"Your Fathers, the Jesuits, have already decided on your fate. We know all about you, and have taken our decision"—the Unknown, who at that point became known, dropped his voice, and once again said, "We know."

The transgressor against nature, slipped from his chair,

cried aloud as he clasped the other's knees, and in a voice that was less than a whisper he began to unburden his agonized soul into the other's ear. The Jesuit heard him to the end : whereupon, wasting no compassion on the man, he confirmed his fears.

"For a sodomite like you, confession naturally comes too late. You can find no rest, neither here nor there. It may be, however, that Heaven will remit your eternal damnation at the price a martyr's death upon this earth."

"Were I but a murderer !" wailed the wretched creature.

"You have said so already. A miserable object such as you longs to do what he never does."

The sinner : "How I envy that great lord who put his feet into the girl's slit belly, and was torn to pieces. He redeemed himself."

The Jesuit : "Too trifling a penalty for such a case as yours. You will go straight into the same pit of Hell as a certain other, who by his lewdness pollutes the sanctuary, and aims his abominable lusts at—at what indeed ! He would impose his will on God Himself. He acts in all things as you do. But you are a poor worm, while he is the consecrated vessel of supreme sovereignty : of majesty itself."

The sinner : "None the less I am made after his pattern and he after mine. That, at least, is my privilege."

The Jesuit : "And you shall go hence with him. If he takes the risk ; and that is not yet so certain. Born a lecher, he avenges his own nature on other lechers, inflicts a dreadful death on them, and so thinks to sneak into salvation by atoning for his sins in the persons of those like unto himself."

The sinner : "You have told me that I am a man like him. Reverend Father, I see how the matter lies ; I must be beforehand with him, and do to him what he purposes to do to me."

The Jesuit : "I did not say so. You have said so,"

The sinner ; "I'll do it,"

The Jesuit : " And earn a martyr's death ; poor creature, are you man enough ? Indeed you will otherwise be certain of eternal martyrdom, without choice given."

The sinner : " May I expect God's grace for a work of merit ? "

The Jesuit : " Old and hardened sinners have been pardoned for a mere gift of alms, the only one they made in all their lives. But even the most pious and profitable deed may not save a soul once lost. There can be no trafficking with grace, a man must submit himself to it, for good or ill."

The sinner, sobbing : " I submit myself."

The Jesuit : " So far, so good. What remains may not be decided by a humble personage like myself. Is your chosen deed both pious and profitable ? "

The sinner : " If he can expiate his offences by my death, how much more easily can I do so by his—since he is the King."

The Jesuit : " Your expiation is a matter on which the Fathers will not waste their time. They will examine the case and guilt of a King who persecutes the Faith, but tolerates heresy."

The sinner : " You say well, Reverend Father, that I am a worm. I take a pride in being so."

NOT YET

On December the twelfth the King and the Marquise de Monceaux appeared in the city of Amiens. They came with a small escort, and at once waited on the ecclesiastical magistrate, just like an ordinary couple who want to marry, and are petitioning for the divorce of one party. They were sent about their business and told to wait until the husband had made his statement of defence. Monsieur de Liancourt had hitherto not responded to the citation. From motives of self-respect he put off the inevitable humiliation, though in truth he had already

consented, subject to some personal reservations that he would not waive for very decency. In his coffer lay his solemn, written testimony, to be read after his demise, and preserved for all time.

On the seventeenth, when the pair had waited five days, he at last presented himself at the magistrate's house ; he had with him his notary, but the attorney acting for Gabrielle d'Estrées contested the evidence of both. No one else was present, the magistrate's house was barred to all comers. From common knowledge of Monsieur Nicholas d'Amerval de Liancourt, he must have expressed himself with proper decorum. On the other hand, he provided his truculent adversary, who appeared for the lady d'Estrées, with but few facts to serve his purpose ; for Monsieur de Liancourt was a man of no mean intelligence.

The attorney then consulted the woman petitioner and agreed with her and her Royal lover that they would no longer base their claim solely on the defendant's impotence. The defendant's first wife had been a step-cousin of Monsieur Jean d'Estrées, father of the woman petitioner. This was a tangible fact, which he could admit with little damage to his honour ; it sufficed, however, to invalidate his second marriage.

But the matter did not rest there ; the magistrate examined all the evidence in the strictest and most impartial manner, though, despite his conscience, rather more rapidly than usual, owing to the presence of the King. Monsieur de Liancourt was confronted with the female petitioner. He had to answer for the fact he had never been able to cohabit with her, whenever he had made the attempt. He had to listen to the statements of two doctors, a Doctor of Medicine, and a Master Surgeon, who produced evidence in their support : though whence they had got it could scarce be understood—hardly by material diagnosis ! The man's remote expression, his impenetrable decorum, and his masked self-confidence, seemed to lend little weight to any charge of incapacity.

The magistrate turned from the Defendant and addressed the plain question to the petitioner :

"Had you, knowing his condition, agreed to live with Monsieur de Liancourt as brother and sister ? "

"No," replied Gabrielle.

In the end the marriage was pronounced invalid—the decisive reason being the step-cousin. But there was uneasy sense that Monsieur de Liancourt had won the day. He took leave of the King himself with the words : "Sire, I trust I have acted in all matters as you desired." Which might indeed have been intended as plain insolence, though the man bent low in a most obsequious bow, and so remained until the pair had left the room. No one could find an appropriate reply.

Enough : the beloved lady was free, and what was to come need not be forthwith considered. In high good humour the pair hastened back to Paris, where they stopped at Gabrielle's house. She went in to change her dress. The King, booted and covered with dust as he had arrived, was soon the centre of a throng : his cousins, Conti and Soissons, had brought at least thirty noblemen with them, who were soon joined on their own account by several gentlemen new to the Court. They were not known to the door-keeper, but he had orders to admit them, so that anyone who pleased made his way into the small room where the King was sitting.

The King jested gaily with Mathurine the Fool, a buxom young person, no more than slightly touched in her wits, who was a duly acknowledged figure at Court. If there is to be an office of Fool, then let feminine folly be represented too ; and a King, by marking the sallies of a Chicot and a Mathurine, increases his knowledge of his fellow-men. While greeting the gentlemen as they entered, the King kept up an exchange of gallantries with Mathurine, which neither he nor she took seriously, though she, with upturned eyes, pleaded for a kiss. A sudden noise was heard, like a clap on the ear ; none could see what was happening in the dark corner where the King sat.

"Curse the crazy wretch, she bites," cried the King. And he raised a hand to his lips; in an instant it was covered with blood. A certain Monsieur de Montigny, who had bowed low to kiss the King's knee, started up and saw behind the King an unknown face, pallid and convulsed. "'Tis you or I," shouted Montigny, in a flurry of rage. "One of us has wounded the King." He seized the pallid youth, and found at his feet the blood-stained knife. After an attempt at disavowal, he confessed that he had stabbed the King. As a result of the King's horseplay with Mathurine, he had missed Henri's throat and merely grazed his lip. The King said: "Let him go." But the man held out his hands; he was seized and hurried away. He would not reveal who he was; only his age—eighteen.

The King's surgeon promptly sewed up the lip. He would have drawn the needle several more times through the wound, but the King could not endure the pain. The injury left his mouth markedly awry—a defect which was commonly ascribed to his habit of dissembling. The charming Gabrielle dashed into the room just as the operation began. She held her dear lord's head, she kissed him on the eyes, so that he should feel only her and nothing else. When he groaned, she turned her lovely face from side to side, and met with none but chilly looks, whereby she realized that, but for a hand's breadth, she would have been left desolate, and would have had to go, if indeed she had been allowed to go. She clenched her teeth, and was the charming Gabrielle no more.

The King's wound hurt him, but he was not much shaken, and said that he would not retire any earlier for such a trifle. Indeed he went to the cathedral and attended a service of thanksgiving. The would-be murderer was condemned and executed three days later, without revealing his accomplices, though he was put to the question. They were however known, and the Royal Parliament had one of its former professors hanged. All members of the Society of Jesus were banished from the kingdom.

Such firmness at last induced the Pope to yield ; and shortly afterwards he received the King of France into the bosom of the Church, which the survivors of the League had done their utmost to prevent. During their brief respite, they all took up arms—Mayenne, Nemours, Epernon, Joyeuse, and Mercœur, powerful noblemen, each in his own province. They summoned the Spaniards from the Netherlands, for the last time King Henri had to encounter revolt and civil war—but judgment had been pronounced on them and their time had passed away. None the less, the King, despite his firm resolves, lost heart for a while ; joyful service ?—he had no feeling for it left.

Twenty years of joyful service, begun as a petty King of Navarre ; battle, and victory, the seizure of power, the leap of death, and years and years of toil ; all of it now seemed futile. He had achieved nothing, neither peace nor his people's love, and no true grasp of power. He was not shaken when another attempt was made upon his life ; but he grew anxious and weary—he who had never known weariness. The signs of it were remarked. A lady of the Court permitted herself to observe that she had never seen her gay lord in such a mood. Was he discontented ? Whereat he rapped out his favourite oath and relieved himself in words—against the people ; not by any means against the forces that egged them on to what they did. Of them he must say nothing, even in the presence of that innocent lady. Ungrateful people !—who think of nothing but attacks upon their King.

A very gloomy day was the fifth of the New Year : great processions, the King following in his coach, the horses walking in step as though at a funeral. Wherefore ? Not on his account. They have not got him—not yet. Somewhere in the serried throng a bitter voice cried : “ Why, he might be driving in the execution cart to the *Place de la Grève*.” There are words at which a man may, as he chooses, laugh or weep. Henri did not move a muscle of his face, he sat like a very criminal, clad in black, with plastered lip. That bitter nameless voice

seemed in a measure justified. Was he really on his way to execution ?

When he alighted outside the church, his people cheered and his gentlemen offered their congratulations. Henri muttered : " Pah ! 'Tis but a street crowd. My greatest enemies would do as much and more." It was indeed a gloomy day. Others followed it, and yet others after them. What a man is, and means to be, gradually wins the mastery, enriched indeed and burdened with experience. A wise character is not disposed again to blink the fact that unreason and evil exist in the world, from which they are not to be expelled by the most honourable efforts. On the contrary, a wise character tests itself and learns, and merely grows more adaptable to the movement of existence.

Henri recovered his humour—it had been his since boyhood, and was still unchanged. Except that he had gained experience on another level of life, and in the light of it he viewed the world. In particular, he did not always behave in accordance with the rules of majesty ; he had none of the pomp and mystery of sovereignty. In this regard, the common folk, by means of which they were themselves unconscious, came to an understanding with their ruler. Many a man knew what liberties he could take, provided he chose his hour aright. One day when Henri was at the Fair, there appeared out of one of the booths, a buffoon in his own likeness, and dressed as he had been on a certain day : in black, with a patch of plaster on his lip. Suddenly, by a clever twist of feature, the hangdog countenance was transfigured, and the fellow, in his guise of royalty, began to shout ribald jokes, amid the laughter of the bystanders.

There was nothing that Henri could or cared to do. He disposed of the man with a present of money, and went his way ; again he understood more clearly why he had missed his people's love, like a jousting knight who fails to spit the ring. The love of his people was not made so easy of achievement. They claimed of earthly majesty

what they claimed of the Divine : the ways of a King, as those of God, must be stern, incalculable, but always dignified. Sovereignty in the guise of homeliness was neither understood nor pardoned ; it had to be warranted in due time by a greatness and glory that had never before been seen. In the end, perhaps not until after it, he was to win his people's love. But not yet. Not yet would he be murdered, and not yet loved.

His old friend Agrippa said to him after the last attempt on his life : " Sire, you had first renounced the Religion with your lips : this time the knife struck you on the mouth. Woe upon you, had you renounced it in your heart." Whercat the King nodded. In those days he again met the jurist who had uttered that ill-omened speech at Saint-Denis, long before it had been fulfilled by a murderous plot against his life. The man had shunned another encounter, and now looked away. The King reassured him by a mild, friendly salutation, nor did he mention their previous meeting ; it was only as they parted that he said with some emphasis : "*Nihil tam popolare quam bonitas*". The man looked at him wide-eyed, in admiration.

Thus were the harsh and precipitous passages of life made smooth, and the mind encountered them without fear—or almost without fear. Not that Henri would have greeted an unguarded mob, that chanced to gather round him, with quite the same feelings as before. " I am glad to see so many of my people," he would observe. " But I must become accustomed to them first." The young Duke of Guise, also, he was delighted to receive, and glad to pardon him. The youth had realized what the old Duke could never see, that the time for resistance was past, and the claims of his House were out of date. He came to the Louvre and offered the King his submission, and therewith a renunciation by the House of Lorraine of any claim to the French crown. His father had been the resplendent hero of the League ; he indeed had won the people's love. The King said to the Duke of Guise, who stood embarrassed in his presence :

"Enough : we are neither of us men of words. You are with us now, and you shall prosper. I take your father's place." He embraced his foremost enemy, and promptly used the advantage by declaring war on Spain.

Philip, once ruler of the world, was defeated by Henri. It was his first acknowledged victory over the World Power. For many a long year the Spaniards had always fought under the cloak of the enemy within his border ; there had never been an open declaration of war and an invasion of the kingdom. Henri at last had his old and hated enemy confronting him unmasked. The inner enemy had now dwindled into a feeble contingent of auxiliaries, and was beaten in the company of Spain—this in the venturesome and perilous fashion in which Henri still fought and won his battles. He himself plunged into the fray. With no more than a hundred horsemen, he drove a superior force headlong before him and broke them up. He was still the old Henri ; the " King of Navarre ", as though he were still young. And indeed the very act brought back his youth. All could see it ; and with throbbing hearts and open mouths they listened to the voice of *Fama* : " Our King is still young, he is the greatest in the world, there is none like him, and he is ours. In him we have been reconciled. Neither Parties nor Leagues, and not even the faith can part us now. We fight no longer as men harried and distracted. We fight the battles of a nation."

This was the exuberance of the moment, as Henri well knew. Even in the intoxication of battle he kept before his mind what a nation was, and was well aware that his people did not love him. Not yet. Battles are days of festival, though somewhat perilous ones, and victories are a notable encroachment on the truth. Much toil and labour was to reveal the truth of him at last. After a storm of success life seemed so smooth and so responsive. The last great nobles, or almost the last, submitted, including the corpulent Mayenne. His corpulence had become pitiable ; it irked Henri to think that such enemies are

never overcome until they can rouse no feeling but that of pity. Henri received them at Monceaux, the estate of the Marquise—with music, plays, banquets, and every honour. He watched Mayenne make three bows, with two adjutants to support his belly. Henri would not permit him to kneel. Only in the park did he stride out until his fat companion began to gasp ; that was his sole revenge. “Your hand, cousin—let us now be friends.” And he bade Rosny revive him with two bottles of wine.

As was not unexpected, the parliament would make no grant of money to the King. The nation was too impoverished. But for twenty years long it had never been too impoverished to wage civil war. Here stood the King, who had saved the nation from itself, even more than from the enemy. “I speak,” said the King to his parliament : “from my heart. The French, I know, do not love what they see before their eyes. When you no longer see me, you will love me.”

He spoke without sadness or bitterness, but in his most familiar tone : and what he meant them to understand was this :—Love me or love me not. I serve you, and I serve you joyfully.

BOOK FIVE

THE CONQUEROR

FIREWORKS

Two small toy-like cannon were firing harmlessly at the blue heaven. Tiny wreaths of smoke floated over the park, and soon vanished in the soft air. The ladies on the broad stairway of the castle laughed as they aired their charms, resting a white arm on a red cushion, fanning themselves, and turning their heads with practised grace towards the cavaliers who sat one step above them. When the gentleman was slim enough, he bent a knee and so remained behind his lady, as long as the performance lasted.

At the signal-shots from the two mortars, all the hedges and arbours and green avenues were suddenly populated by shepherds, shepherdesses, and rustic deities: while invisible musicians played solemn pastoral melodies. The figures of the masque, though intended to present the primeval life of nature, moved and stepped and turned with all the intricate rhythm of a dance; even the little faun butted the shepherdess in time to the music, and her shrieks were set to a melody on the oboes.

It was a pretty performance and lasted a full hour, for every incident had to be repeated. The lady of the castle, in the centre of the front row, clapped her hands and her lovely face flushed with pleasure. The King at her side, cried: "Encore!" And so the masque was played once more. In the end, the shepherds, in pink and yellow silk, remained the victors, each over a sylvan deity, wrapped in a counterfeit leopard skin of lace, whom he laid gracefully upon his back. Then he lifted the vanquished maiden from the ground, held her in his outstretched hands, and circled round and round on tiptoe

with his lovely prey. Nothing could be seen but silvery dust, topped by the whirling, sunlit limbs of the shepherdess. Her partner blazed beneath her like a flame. Six pairs, six of these moving flames and burning clouds, spun round and round until a louder outburst of applause hinted to the dancers that they might stop.

Then each man set his lady on the ground, and all twelve, hand in hand, bowed to their noble audience, and smiled, as though the whole performance had cost them no effort ; but in truth they could hardly stand upright or see. The youngest dancer's wreath of narcissus slipped down over her nose, and she could not straighten it. Gabrielle hurried forward before any one could stop her—set the little creature's wreath to rights, and kissed her flushed face.

The King led his dear lady back to her place, and a faint mutter of applause greeted the indecorous impulse which the audience would otherwise have disapproved. The shepherds and shepherdesses then departed, and the sylvan gods rounded off the performance with ludicrous goat-capers. First they leapt over each other, then over the lower hedges, then over the highest, until all had vanished into the rustling foliage. Then came a burst of melody from the hidden musicians, and to its rhythm the company moved into the castle and took their places at the tables laid out round the great banquetting hall. The King had a small table apart for himself and the Marquise. Her guests sat at the larger one, which had been arranged in the shape of a gallows, as several noblemen did not fail to indicate to fat Mayenne. But his hunger, if nothing else, made him unreceptive of a jest. At his side, the blonde hostess's dark-haired sister took the head of the table.

Diane d'Estrées, now wife of the Marshal de Balagny, had had but poor fortune of late. The city of Cambrai, where her husband was Governor, had been surprised and taken by the Spaniards. Now Cambrai lies in Artois, almost in Flanders ; sometimes it was in the King's

authority, and sometimes not. His fame did not suffer when he lost Cambrai ; he was still the conqueror of the Spaniards. The world heard only of his victories, and nothing at all of Cambrai. He was a great King, the greatest after Don Philip's catholic Majesty, whose decline and decay was the work of the King of France ; this for the whole of Europe, that would have it so, and must be left in that conviction. Pin-pricks were better not regarded, their futility was realized by even the vanquished party. He might disturb such celebrations as those held that day, but he could do no more. In that kingdom he would never again appear as though it were his own. It is mine, thought Henri ; I have paid for it.

These thoughts were in his mind while he figured at the feast ; he savoured the dishes, whispered gallantries into his mistress's shapely ear, raised his glass to Mayenne, his humbled enemy. He called on a certain nobleman of the Court, Monsieur de Signogne to describe the allegorical piece that he had devised and rehearsed with his company of players : the characters were from the ancient myths, but it was designed to the glory of the King of France.

It was to be performed that very evening in the hall, in addition to a grand ballet on the morrow. The guests, the hostess, and the King no less, were all eager for it, they delighted in agreeable spectacles and things of pleasant import. The reality—alas—was far from cheerful, and had to be confronted in good earnest. Days came and passed, on which Henri merely wished to be left in peace ; he was weary of danger, though never of amusement.

At table it was reported that Calais had fallen. Not a city which had, for a time, been as good as given up ; but Calais, one of the keys of the kingdom. A silence fell upon the assemblage. Some were too surprised to speak, some were silenced by the shock, or by the privy thoughts that came into their minds, and some, who put on a gloomy air, were glad. Aha ! The Cardinal of Austria, at the head of a German army, had dealt that blow at Calais unobserved—Calais, the city and sea-fortress confronting

England. How would this affect the kingdom and the new reign? He now had Spain once more upon his coast; and beyond the channel, the Queen had disavowed her one-time friend, the renegade Protestant. The feasting here must end. A Marquise, whose rank and name should be very different—her venal lap should no longer receive the revenues wrung from us by the accursed Rosny. The guilt lay upon the King, and he must pay for it.

Such thoughts were never far away; the fall of Calais brought them to men's lips, and some covered their mouths with their hands. They looked enquiringly at Mayenne. Mayenne had been assiduously filling his belly, and wished he could have removed himself and his belly from that assemblage. The news came at an unpleasant moment; just as his digestion had begun, he had to consider whether he had not blundered by making his submission too soon. He did not think so—first, on account of his digestion, and further because he could not bear to think that his defeat had been in vain. He disliked the Cardinal of Austria, as he had often observed. Mayenne was the first to break the silence; he muttered into his glass, which lent a sort of hollow echo to his words. "A bag of bones like that—he'll do no good." Wherewith he tilted his glass and drained it.

It was the speech of one who knew—he had proved in his own person whether it was possible to get the better of this King. So all who had been listening to Mayenne looked towards the King. Henri was prepared; his good humour, which was sometimes lacking when he thought himself unheeded, did not fail him now. He said across the gallows-shaped table: "Well, Calais is gone. No matter. I have suffered worse things in war. Now it is the enemy's turn, but ours will soon come back. God has never forsaken me, when I besought Him from my heart. And now let us honour the memory of the dead—and then consider our requital, which we'll take with interest and compound interest."

Such were his words. But he remained seated for a

while, though he flung a word or a brief order to some few of the company. At the word interest, all eyes promptly fell on Monsieur de Rosny, provider of money to the King. His set countenance looked truly formidable; each of that company wondered silently how much the fall of Calais would cost him in the end. In his usual cold voice without a glance at anyone, Rosny said :

"The Cardinal of Austria did not take Calais at once. He got Cambrai first."

The Marquise's sister started up, and would have answered angrily. Monsieur de Rosny's stony demeanour made that impossible; indeed the unlucky Diane could do no other than stare at her plate, as did all the rest, or they would otherwise have too plainly revealed what was in their minds: the mistress's family, and she herself, must answer for this disaster. They enriched themselves, and delivered up the cities of the kingdom to the enemy.

Meanwhile something for which the King had sent was put into his hands. A portrait of the Queen of England; he turned it this way and that until all could see whom it represented; a sixty-year-old woman, rigid and unwearied. Her cities were not lost while she feasted, and watched ballets. The King raised the picture to his lips, and kissed it, as all thought. In truth it did not touch his mouth, but from behind the frame, that covered his eyes, he sought those of his companion. Gabrielle realized that he wanted to reassure her, but this time she would not listen to his protestations, whether whispered or mirrored in his eyes. She had grown pale. There were enemies about her. In that hour even her dear lord could not protect her against their hatred. And so, in the sight of all, she laid her lifted hands together, as she did when at prayer in her own chamber. She bent over the picture—and not the great Elizabeth, only the wood that framed her counterfeited image, received Gabrielle's submissive kiss.

Despite of all, Monsieur de Signogne was able to present his ingenious play that evening. It was received with

profound admiration, as it could hardly fail to be. The hero was a King, so victorious and intelligent and handsome that the God Mars could do no less than bestow Venus upon him ; who promised to bear him brave and noble sons. At the supper that followed were served the small oysters that the King especially liked, and he pretended to enjoy them. At least he did not need to talk—he could reflect that for a while he had better maintain the guise of weariness and nonchalance. The war was not at an end, he knew that now, even supposing that his name and fame had blinded him to that fact. A double danger threatened him, if he reconquered Calais from the sea, which was his next task ; and the Queen of England would certainly send him help. But it was equally probable that *she would never let Calais go*. So he merely had the choice of whether he preferred the stubborn power of England on his coast, or Spain striking her last feeble blows.

On the other hand, it came upon the King that here was really a new enemy who stood within his frontiers. The Cardinal of Austria, his German princes, and his troops : the old enemy, with another face. Hapsburg had several ; the world empire was a hydra. When he had cut off one head, there were ten more to hiss at him. He must destroy the whole monster. He must challenge the Roman Emperor, the universal monarchy, and all her Provinces ; even Spain was merely one of them, Philip, the Ruler of the World, was under orders ; and there were many others. He alone, as present events portended, confronted the entire hydra, which bore the name of Christendom.

The prospect shook him. Only a few moments earlier, he had not realized what he would have to face. Now it appeared plainly before his mind, and for the first time. A great calamity had come upon him ; that was his first reflection. He confronted what was to be his last mission, and it went beyond his strength.

He rose from the table, withdrawing into a dark corner, where none could see his fear, nor suspect what now beset

him. But his companion laid an anxious hand upon his arm. He looked at her, and saw that his fear was shared by his companion—who could not measure it, nor suspect its cause. None the less she suffered with him ; she had gradually become a piece of himself through her blood and senses, and would remain so until her end. So he drew her to his side, and they vanished together into the darkness of the garden.

They mounted the broad terrace outside their bed-chamber, where they could be heard by no one. And Gabrielle whispered : “ My beloved lord, we have enemies. To help you conquer the Cardinal of Austria, I will sell all that I possess and put the price of it in your war-chest.”

“ My dear love,” replied Henri, “ you are my incomparable possession. Let us forget these enemies : there might well be too many of them if we thought of them by name.”

A mysterious utterance, which Gabrielle neither understood nor questioned ; both stood silent, as though the time had come for endearments : but Henri’s pre-occupation had put them sadly out of mind. He tried to banish his obsession, but the effort set him pondering on his accepted mission. Above his strength or not—he had accepted it.

He reflected :—from his youth upward, all his toils and conflicts had been brought on him by Spain, no matter whom he fought, what bullets whistled round his ears, how many cities he stormed, and how many enemies he conciliated ; until, at the end, he had become master of his kingdom. It had cost him half his life and more. Now he wanted rest, and time for the works of peace. Surely the Pyrenees were high enough, no need to pile Pelion upon Ossa. After him, let the new enemy arise ; or new heads grow upon the ancient monster. He had had his share—and he broke out in his familiar oath, which reached her ears.

Gabrielle too was stirred by this inner colloquy, of which she had indeed no notion : “ Sire,” said she,

"am I really your evil genius? Calais falls and I am hated. Monsieur de Rosny conceives the guilt is mine."

"My dear love," said Henri, his mouth very close to hers, while his breath came and went in angry gasps, "Monsieur de Rosny shall atone by returning to the Arsenal to-morrow, where he belongs. We will stay and spend the day at your dairy farm among your forty sleek cows, and picnic on the grass. In your honour all the ladies shall appear in rustic clothes. You are the centre of my life and joy."

"My dear lord," she said, "I am again expecting a child from you."

Herewith she closed her eyes, although it was dark; but she could feel his heart leap for joy. His fierce breathing she could no longer hear, his lips met hers, and the deep silence of their embrace was measured by their throbbing pulses.

Then, from the garden below, came a crack and a hiss, a fiery streamer shot up into the sky, curved and dropped, and, with a scatter of sparks, went out. Hark to the babble of voices from those strolling in the dim garden or on the terrace, or peering from the windows into darkness outside!

All knew, of course, what would follow. After the first forerunner, the rockets would go up in clusters, and it was so; as the company walked to and fro, the heavens were seared with flaming fountains, rays, sheaves, and globes, that flashed and burst into a shower of blue and red and white. Against a bank of foliage, a wheel leapt into light and poured forth silvery rain, shedding so unearthly a radiance, that the garden seemed to rise out of the darkness and hover in the void, a very abode for fairies. And behold—the swan! Above that glittering domain floated a swan; it shimmered, moved its wings, and came to rest—and then vanished with that wondrous cry that swans are fabled to utter when they die.

Suddenly, darkness as before, and the onlookers rubbed their eyes. Fireworks, nothing more; and there was

much laughter among the onlookers at their own easy bewilderment. But while the performance lasted, strange thoughts were set astir in many a mind ; thoughts that soared up to an inner heaven, that was marvellous to look upon. Henri had a vision of his whole heaven aflame. With a joy that he had never known, and in full acceptance, he grasped that mission that had daunted him a while ago. He would fulfil it, and destroy the empire of darkness.

It was they or he : they were still intent upon his destruction. But with his destruction, they meant to compass a yet greater one, and destroy freedom, reason and humanity. Their universal monarchy and world sovereignty had mastered many limbs of Christendom, and a monster would come of them, with a misshapen body and many poisonous heads. His cause was to help the nations live, and live by reason, not travail within the swollen belly of the Universal Power, which had engulfed them. It was his mission to save so many of them as still had the choice, and follow in the footsteps of the Son of Man. He knew that the way led to Golgotha : but no matter.

Came a spurt of silver from the wheel, and the swan floated overhead. No matter, thought Henri. Nothing was certain, why look forward to Calvary ? They should not get him ; they had not mastered France. He would, in God's name, found a free League of the Kingdoms and Republics that had escaped, and could still stand against Hapsburg.

Outside, the sparks were scattering before darkness fell once more. What was Hapsburg, after all ? thought Henri. An emperor, dominated, like his peoples, by the monks. Therewith, the tainted monarch beyond the mountains, who had talked loudest of all. Well, Henri made no war upon their persons and their country ;—properly speaking, there was no globe that would show where their country lay. It lay in the domain of Evil. His realm began at the frontier where people can use their understanding, and are no longer wholly slaves. By God, he would win that fight !

The first words he said thereafter to Gabrielle, were these : " Truly, Madam, my Rosny is an admirable mediocrity ! "

A free league of Kingdoms and Republics was a notion that never entered the head of that faithful servant, though fiery rays tore through the air and swans floated in the darkness.

" So the fall of Calais is not my fault ? " asked Gabrielle. And he said :

" Calais, the Cardinal of Austria, yourself and I : what indeed are causes and effects ? One might get a notion of them while the fireworks lasted, but no longer." He spoke wearily.

" Let us go in," said she ; and he escorted his beloved lady into the room they shared, the finest in the house. He shook his head, as he saw the bed for the first time. Its mattresses were covered with white silk, and the pillows embroidered with a design of H and G intertwined. Folded across the lower end lay the coverlet, of crimson damask, threaded with gold. From the canopy hung curtains of yellow Genoese velvet. Such a bed had never received that impoverished King before. His lady noticed his hesitation.

" My lord, you think as I do, that we should sell everything to fill your war-chest."

" Alas, I have had dreams far more hazardous," replied Henri. " I took them for the true meaning of things, so long as the fireworks lasted. Indeed I made my way into a very exalted sphere—and I scarce know how I strayed there. We are here below, and must always do what lies nearest to our hand ; and what lies nearest to me now is—that I love you."

SUCCESS

The next matter of concern was, as usual, to raise money ; and this time the crisis produced something like

a panic. Any day their fate might come upon them, and on behalf of Spain, though at her last gasp, the Roman Empire would move in all its might. Enemy armies that the kingdom had never seen, barbaric tribes from Eastern Europe, curved sabres, small wild horses, men with yellow skins and slanting eyes—all this would trample down the fields of France and burn her cities. No one could foresee that terror, nor picture it, except the King alone. And at night the horror came upon him in colours all too crude ; which was because he bore his anxiety alone. These anxieties were kept from his people, and his Paris parliament, then engaged in grumbling at the expense of the Marquise's ballets,—and even from Rosny, who found the King was growing hysterical.

When the King quoted figures, they were seldom correct ; this was a subject which, in Rosny's view, he should have avoided. Eight Finance Counsellors, excluding Rosny, no longer disposed of a million and a half crowns, as the King imagined ; Rosny saw to that. But he could scarcely raise funds for war, by depriving eight people of their pilfered gains. Moreover, Rosny liked to believe that the principle of order was gaining on the world, and within the compass that was his, he laboured soberly to that end. Still less did the men of Parliament, whose affairs had at last been brought to a settlement, share the King's notions. Curved sabres, small wild horses, men with yellow skins and slanting eyes—that could never happen here. Civilization reigned in France.

And who was it, that by much toil and labour, made you think that it so reigned ? Thus might the King have replied to his friends, the jurists. But he was silent—he did not want to intensify the danger by speaking his mind, and none others shared his nightmares. In the company of his beloved lady he betook himself to Rouen ; she was bidden to come with him ; for he had several matters in mind. After an entry into the city, which aroused no great enthusiasm, he waited for a purpose of his own ; he was to make an address that he had long meditated, to

the Estates of his Province of Normandy. The Assembly was held in the Chapter House of the Abbey of Saint-Ouen, a very sacred place : for a King who there challenged the judgment of such a body, and that for the first time, must risk no failure.

Before he appeared, the assembly had gathered in full strength, and the members could observe how fully each estate was represented : nine Bishops, nineteen nobles, and no less than thirty-two burghers, including craftsmen and peasants. Not a large body, but constituted as none of the sort had been before, by the express order of the King, when he first appeared in the presence of his people's deputies. Cautiously, in true Norman fashion, they talked of him and his ways, which were new and strange to them, so far as they had yet had dealings with each other. He had been a heretic, and a dubious adventurer from the South, when he laid fierce siege to their city, though he had bought it in the end ; which they approved a sagacious and praiseworthy proceeding. On the other hand, as touching his personal demeanour, it by no means befitted their conception of the dignity and reserve that a sovereign should display ; quite apart from what is called majesty, which in him was wholly absent. Should a King bring his mistress with him when he received the submission of the sedate and rain-swept city of Rouen ; and now of all times when he made his ceremonial entry ? The Marquise had not been offered the customary bread and wine, though she had taken the best lodging in the abbey. To each according to their desert. Moreover, since the arrival of the pair, the streets had been lit, though only by express command, and in their view the money for this purpose had much better have been saved.

Rise, rise—the King ! He entered, escorted with such pomp as he could muster, by twelve gentlemen, chosen for their thews and stature ; and the Papal Legate was also present. Sit down under the canopy, my little man from nowhere, now grown so great ; you will need a skill that we misdoubt you have not, to overcome our mistrust

of your light-hearted ways. But how is this? The majesty so lacking—here it is, displayed forthwith. He stood on a dais to address them, used the words of every day and spoke quite naturally—but tone and speech were instinct with majesty itself. Of a sort, indeed, to which they were unaccustomed. Not that it seemed to come from other climes, but from a man whose like they had never seen : and he, as was well known, did not always use it. But he had it.

Henri carried a few sheets of paper, loosely disposed like a hand of cards, so that a casual glance would promptly catch the word he sought. The script was large, indeed he had taken care to write out the sentences himself, that there might be no omission and no mistake. He now talked as though the words he used were of no moment, so exactly had he tested them beforehand. He said : “ If I wished to shine as an orator ”—and he most manifestly shone. “ I am ambitious to bear two glorious titles. I would be known as the deliverer and restorer of this State.”

At first he ascribed all achievements to his faithful officers, to his high-hearted nobles : then, suddenly, he stepped into the foreground. “ I saved France from ruin ; let us preserve it from the fresh destruction that now threatens ! ” Whereby he appealed to all there represented, the main body of the labouring classes. They were to help him, not merely by their obedience ; he needed their confidence and asked their counsel. This was noteworthy and new. His beloved subjects, he also called them, and said that he had not summoned them, as his predecessors had done, to approve everything he had already decided. “ I have assembled you to receive your advice, to trust in it and to follow it, in brief to place myself in your hands and under your tutelage.”

What a word ! The noisy breathing of the assemblage at the word “ tutelage ” was provided for in the manuscript by several empty lines. A glance by the speaker at the last of the sheets, and its scrawling script ; and the King spoke, with all his reserves of power and majesty.

"Such a desire seldom comes to kings, to greybeards and to conquerors. All things will come easily to one who loves you as I do, and would be known as your deliverer."

He sat down, waved them to their seats, and let some minutes pass, leaning loosely in his chair, as though he had made no great professions, but had merely spoken plainly to plain people. Down below they were putting their heads together, until one cleared his throat, got up, and began to speak; though the secretaries understood but little of what he said. The peasant spoke the country dialect, moreover his embarrassment was as great as his excitement. He promised the King that for his part he would give a penny out of every pound, and that as often as he sold a head of cattle or a sack of corn. Others, who saw further and could express themselves more fluently, added what they could do. No one on that account believed that much money would be forthcoming: otherwise, such as were rich would have to sacrifice half their fortunes. He who possessed little, but yet something, made no such demand upon his betters. But so much had been achieved. They had seen the King in homelier guise, and in his majesty. They mistrusted him no more.

He came down from the dais, and disappeared at the back, so quickly that the onlookers did not know whither and how, which thus added a touch of mystery to the impression he had made. They indeed mistrusted him no more—not all of them, and at least not for the present. There was something strange about him still, and it may be that this had actually served his turn. The Normans stood cautiously discussing their opinions of the King after what had passed, gathered in little groups, rather undecided, not disinclined to listen to those who must surely be better acquainted with this unusual King. Those were his own people, whom he had brought with him for the occasion; several of them specially chosen, to tell the Normans what they needed to know. Upon these he could rely; less upon the others, who had remained behind of their own free will.

Henri, behind his curtain, whispered to Gabrielle :

“How did I speak ?”

“Nobly. No one can speak as you can. But why—protection ? You brought the word in well, the tears came into my eyes. But would you really have them thus, rather than your subjects ?”

He cursed under his breath at her want of understanding : took her hand and laid it on his sword. “With this at my side,” said he.

Then he bade her sit quietly in her chair, in view of her condition, while he himself listened at the curtain. At first he caught voices from the Third Estates, slow, lumbering speech, but without a hint of mockery or protest. The dialect did not prevent him grasping the sense of what was said. If the enemy invaded France again, they might equally be Spaniards, Germans, or even Englishmen ; and these men preferred their own King. They had not wanted a commander, and they certainly did not want war. But if the worse came, they would stand by their King, who, from all appearance, was their man—he had already made good laws, and had asked them to say how much they themselves thought they should pay in taxes. “If it is too little, he can send his guards to fetch more,” said a farmer, who had rightly interpreted the phrase about protection.

A burgher observed that appearances were mostly to be trusted, and he personally could tell from the look of every customer whether he would pay. A dishonourable man was either too accommodating or too off-hand. Everything the King said had been backed by the right expression.

This commercial view was confirmed by one of the jurists. Whether he were the President of the Parliament of Paris, or what he was, Henri from behind his curtain could not tell, but he heard a great deal. “On a man’s face everything is visible, both his joys and fears,” said the President, turning towards the commonalty, that they might profit by his observation,

For the benefit of the Norman lords, Bishops and noblemen, he repeated in the words of Juvenal :

Deprendas animi tormenta.

But one of the lords from near Rouen answered very cautiously : If it were agreed that the art of the tragic actor could make his face reflect any feelings that he pleased, the Greeks would not, as was well known, have esteemed him any the less.

"Curse the fellow," muttered Henri ; "he takes me for an actor."

The craftsmen and the farmers reassured him again ; they specially esteemed the fact that he had been successful. "The last time he came among us, he was out at elbows. And now look at all his pomp and glory. He makes money ; we shall do well under such a King."

A shiver of awe went through the company, and the Marshal de Matignon, whom Henri had sent for to support him, saw his opportunity.

"Good people," said the Marshal, "what you, and many, many others rightly reverence in the King, is something without compare, and which never appears save through a special bestowal by God. And that is majesty."

The less they grasped this mystery, the more effect it had upon them. Their increasing inclination to shake off their hard rusticity, was encouraged by the word "majesty", for they had marked something of the sort in the King, though they could not give a name to it. They had gradually shed their suspicions, and when Matignon went on to tell them that the King had never spoken so openly and familiarly to anyone, then these northern men at last found their tongues. They talked all at once, they praised each others' courage and readiness to give up what they possessed, not merely a penny from a pound, but half a pound and more. They set their lips to talk of a "great man" and of "majesty" ; and some were found to speak of him as "beloved by his people".

Henri, behind his curtain, listened eagerly ; in all the confusion of voices, those last words did not escape him.

They first made him start and bow his head. Then he raised himself to his full height, and said : " I have them." In his own mind he added : For the time. And he prayed to God that this spirit might endure until it had spread to his other provinces, which would be easier to win. He knew why he had begun there. His whole people and kingdom must be roused and ready when those small wild horses and curved sabres stormed out of the East.

In the hall, the Secretary of State, Monsieur de Villeroy, smote his fist upon the table where the protocols were being prepared. He announced that all the commonalty attendant there that day had been ennobled by His Majesty. At this, a profound silence fell, and was not broken until a countryman, no doubt quite overcome, observed rather boorishly, and in the loudest tones : " His Majesty must forgive us, but common blood cannot be dyed blue." An observation that was greeted with a general burst of laughter.

Those least impressed by the quality of majesty and its resonant success, were naturally enough his own gentlemen, whom he had brought with him, and especially the ecclesiastics. One of the two Cardinals reminded the other of a verse of Horace : He leaves aside what he could have in any case, and concerns himself with those who do not want him.

"*Transvolat in medio posita, et fugentia captat*,"—the Cardinal repeated the line in the purest Italian pronunciation. The other's Latin was coloured by a French accent.

"*Nil adeo magnum*——"

He hurriedly rendered the lines from Lucretius in his native tongue :

" Naught is so great and honoured at the outset
That men do not reject it in the end."

The two scholars blinked at each other, with one eye upon the Papal Legate ; he had indeed come there in the plain expectation of seeing the King put down once for all. Now he himself had been put down, and he was

much distressed ; but his memory of the Classics was not a whit inferior to that of the two others.

"What eye," said he, "can have bewitched my little lambs, I know not"—

Thus rendering the line from Vergil : "*Nescio quis teneros oculus mihi fascinat agnos.*"

Whereupon, shaking at the knees, the Legate left the apartment. Then the assemblage broke up.

A Norman lord said, in the doorway, to one of the more exalted jurists : "An old quotation comes into my mind too. *Fortis imaginatio generat casum.* He who holds a matter vividly before his mind, turns it into a reality."

And the jurist answered, still in the doorway : "My lord, you have truly understood our King's character." As they were the last across the threshold, Henri heard them clearly. He craned his head out from behind the curtain to watch them go, and marked that the Norman had the long straight back and fresh complexion of his own Rosny. Well, he could not expect them all to be figures from a cathedral porch. There must be lesser degrees of solidity and stony strength. Rosny, he told himself, is the Norman at his best, he has cast in his lot with me, and that will weigh with them as long as I endure. "I have them," he said aloud ; "even these."

"Dear lady !" he cried ; a few long strides brought him to her and he clasped her in his arms, her fair golden head, the roses and lilies of her cheeks, and the eyes as grey as Norman seas.

"To win you I would have served still longer," he said, speaking close into her lovely lips. And she heard him with such joy, such pride, that she laughed ; indeed, she laughed at him. And he held her very gently because she was near her time.

TWO WOMEN FRIENDS

A week later the King's beloved gave birth to a girl.

Henri thought her very pretty, and had her solemnly baptized as a child of France. She was christened Catherine-Henriette, after the King himself and his sister. Madame, the sister of the King, could not hold her godchild at the ceremony, being a Protestant. But she had the right of sitting by the mother's bedside, as Gabrielle's best friend at Court ; indeed, Gabrielle found no others.

Madame, the sister of the King, dilated to the mother on the beauties of her little daughter ; and did so with almost pious fervour, for physical perfection portended Heaven's favour to the new-born infant, and a happy life on earth. Her own life, although she was known as Madame, sister of the King, offered no more hopes of happiness ; but Catherine was inclined to ascribe her ill-fortune to her lameness. She never betrayed her feelings, she was royally courteous to all comers, and there was still much girlish grace in her now ageing face. Gabrielle alone knew her as she was, for Catherine regarded her with an ardour that amounted to devotion. This woman bore beautiful and healthy children to her brother, a boy and now a girl. She was a chosen vessel, graced by Heaven. At her bedside sat Madame, sister of the King, not in token of kindness or goodwill, but to do her honour.

She passed from the baby's perfections to a description of the gorgeous pillow on which it had been carried in the church of Saint-Ouen. Ladies and gentlemen of the Court, splendidly arrayed, had passed the child of France from hand to hand : such as were so privileged. The pillow was draped with a train of silver brocade trimmed with tailed ermine ; six ells long, and the honour of carrying it was bestowed on Mademoiselle de Guise.

"They all hate me," whispered Gabrielle. She was still too weak to dissemble her uneasiness. And therewithal she felt that her lord's sister might well be told the truth. "Madame," she whispered, "will our lord marry me ?"

"Do not doubt it," said Catherine, kneeling down and stroking the young mother's left hand ; the hand by which

her brother was to lead this woman to the altar. "You have friends ; I am one."

"Have I another?" asked Gabrielle, half sitting up in her astonishment.

"The Princess of Orange wishes, as do I, that the King should marry a woman fitted to be his Queen."

"Am I so fitted? Does a stern and pious lady who in her distant Netherlands hears nothing but ill against me, truly think so?"

Madame stood up, to lend emphasis to what she was about to say :

"The Princess of Orange is of my Religion. We Protestants believe in the freedom of the conscience and the choice of hearts. The King my brother has won the only heart that he desires to keep, and will keep until the end—and he found it in his kingdom."

More she would not say at present ; she left the room soon afterwards, and forbade Gabrielle's women to go in to her, telling them that she needed rest.

Gabrielle lay, and fell to pondering on all these matters, so far as her head, as yet still drained of blood, would serve her. Freedom of conscience—she did not understand the phrase, except that it told in her favour. Two Protestant Princesses, and no one else, stood by her ; it was their wish that the Queen of France should be a lady of that land. Not a daughter of some other Royal House, an Infanta, an Archduchess, or a Princess : not money nor kinship, on which Monsieur de Rosny was so intent, as he searched all Europe for the alliance that should most profit the King.

Gabrielle heard of this after the event. The cold calculations of the faithful Rosny, the hatred of those who despised her and her origin,—she was only too well aware of what indeed was common knowledge. Only the King's love, and the "choice of hearts" served to soften and disguise these harsh and cruel facts. She feared the Infantas, but not until lately had she heard the warning of her inner voice—since her lord had been awaiting the curved sabres

from the East. Yes, but for his fears, hers would not have spoken ; now, through her children, she was of his flesh and of his blood. She had borne a second child to her lord, when danger seemed at a standstill ; she prayed that it might not now advance upon her ; but in her heart, she knew that it must come.

Gabriele turned her face from the light, to ease her thinking. . . . She had two friends, both of the Religion. About the King there were no Protestants, save Monsieur de Rosny, who hated her. What was to happen ? What did Madame mean ? No answer, not now—and would there ever be ?—Sleep, and dream of what you will wear at your wedding.

Gabrielle had been trapped in a game of conflicting forces, knowing nothing of the issues ; she merely felt that there was something ominous about that game. The balls were flying for too high a stake ; which might indeed be herself. The players aimed and caught and missed ; the last player retrieved the balls, and marched off with the stake. The King played so skilfully, he must surely win. And, after all, he had taken that leap of death whereby so much had been decided. What of the game for Gabrielle ? . . . She had gone to sleep, and was dreaming of her wedding dress.

THE CARDINAL OF AUSTRIA

Henri, Gabrielle, and the Court, left Rouen and went back to Paris when Carnival began. That Carnival was a notably boisterous affair ; therein appeared the first consequence of the great game at Rouen, which the King had won. Paris stood aloof no longer. The nobility, and even the respectable burghers, there deigned to share the amusements of the mob, because they thought that the King had a weakness for the common people and their doings. Gentlemen and ladies disported themselves on the market-place and in the packed streets, cavaliers dived

into the throng of criers, students, and porters, though in days gone by they would have had such people cudgelled by their lackeys at the first sign of insolence. Now, they joined in the turmoil and the horseplay, not a few of them were soundly buffeted, and an advocate, of whom such exploits might have been least expected, lost his hat in a low tavern.

The ladies forgot their breeding ; under cover of the tumult they made their way into the booths where abortions were exhibited. Nay more, they made the acquaintance of public women of the baser sort. It was indeed put about that one lady went into a harlot's house disguised of course in a mask, which, even in extremity, was never taken off. Gabrielle, who heard the story, turned her back on the lady at her next reception, although she was usually courtesy itself. It did her no good ; nothing could make her popular, neither her assiduous decorum, nor that single gesture of impatience.

During that Carnival a quatrain was composed upon the King, the Marquise d'Estrées and the Cardinal of Austria, who had taken Calais, and all Paris chanted it.

Bold Henri bids the Spaniard stand,
And marches out to war :
But—he is running from a parson
And clinging to a whore.

Gabriele thought of the good friendly town of Rouen, where they would never have made such verses, nor repeated them. She tried to prevent this, and even paid a few sturdy fellows to take what steps were possible. In vain ; one evening when she and Henri were alone, he betrayed the fact that he knew the verses. And, during their tenderest endearments, he repeated them.

By way of answer, Gabrielle thrust him indignantly away from her. She asked him earnestly to give up play ; even ball-play, well as he played it, and much as she liked watching him, it cost a great deal of money ; but especially cards, which would get him into the hands of the usurers.

She knew whom she had first in mind ; a man called Zamet. His house was equally a gaming-hell, a money-lender's, and brothel ; and the King frequented it.

She thought best to accompany him, at least to the famous Saint-Germain fair, taking several ladies with her, including her Aunt de Sourdis and Madame de Sagonne. The latter was a gossip ; Gabrielle was sure that everything would promptly reach the ears of the Court. So she made the King bargain for a ring, for which the Portuguese vendor asked a fabulous price ; and Gabrielle renounced it. But her self-sacrifice profited her as little as her austerity. Unfriendly talebearers are never at a loss for tales to tell.

On Shrove Tuesday a great ball was given by Madame in honour of Gabrielle. The Tuileries, where Catherine lived, was ablaze with light, every room and nook and corner. Gathered round the King's sister and his beloved were all the ladies of the Court, in the same dress of sea-green silk ; sea-green, because it was the blonde Gabrielle's own colour, and the silk came from the King's workshops. All wore masks ; and to distinguish one from another, a man had to know the lady's figure, or have agreed upon sign.

From a hidden gallery came soft and solemn music ; there were to be none but ceremonial dances, and some of the younger women began to whisper that the evening would be tedious. It was observed that the gentlemen were late in coming, and then that they all came at once. They made a strange entry, some on their haunches, flinging out their feet before them, and so lurching noisily round the room. Others walked upright between the dancers, their height increased by hidden stilts and astrologers' peaked caps : they carried wooden bowls and knives, and rattled them as they went. Their long robes betokened that they were meant to be magicians : while the squatting dancers were equipped with all the implements of barber-surgeons. They even produced what looked like leeches from their pockets,

The ladies at first stared wide-eyed, as their lords circled elaborately round the room, not solely disguised by masks and fantastic noses. The magicians and the barbers, some hopping on their haunches, the others towering above them in their zodiacal hats, not men from the world of men, but mechanic figures in a pantomime jerking past like clockwork toys ; and the ladies looked on in alarm. Were these the men they knew ?—they asked, while the masqueraders revolved. Then some began to titter, and at last many burst into open laughter. Two or three laughed themselves into hysterics, flung themselves over a chair and shrieked.

Their demeanour, and indeed the whole affair, attracted all the palace retainers. Even the porters and soldiers, who kept an eye on inquisitive loiterers below, left their posts, each assuming that another would take his place. That other thought likewise, and so at last they were all in the Royal apartments. They jostled along a gallery towards some open doors whence they could stare into the hall. Then came the loiterers, on whom there was no one now to keep an eye, and all the approaches were packed with onlookers. The soldiers, who had no business there either, took no steps to drive out the populace, and the moving throng was gradually thrust forwards into the hall where the Barber Ballet was proceeding. The lords and ladies had often enough found their way down to the street : the street was now returning their visits.

Among the street people was a real barber, though disguised in a bulbous cardboard nose. The nose, and his profession, conferred on him, as he thought, the right to dance in the barber ballet. He squatted like the other barbers, clattered his implements (which were genuine), and tried to fling out his feet in appropriate fashion. But he had not learned the art of it, so he overturned the dancer before him, and fell into the arms of the one behind. The fall of the barber in front brought down a magician, his stilts slipped from under him, and he crashed full length on to several of the squatting dancers. Then the next

magician tottered. The sense of terror and excitement grew almost unbearable, and mob as well as ladies burst into shouts and yells.

Meantime the real barber lay in the arms of the sham one, and the latter recognized that the other was what he seemed to be.

"Fellow!" he said. "Would you earn a crown?"

"Would I not!" said the other.

"You see that green person behind the glass door. You are to shave her head—shave it completely bald, just as such girls are shaved by the city watch," said the sham barber. And the real one answered:

"But she might be a lady. That is dangerous work, it will cost you a gold piece."

"Very well—a gold piece," said the sham barber, producing one. "The person is wearing a wig, you are only to make a show of shaving her. 'Tis but a jest: be ready when the moment comes."

By this time the figures of the disordered ballet had disentangled themselves, the barbers stood upon their feet, and the magicians had thrown away their stilts. The ladies were much concerned lest their lords might have taken harm in the mishap. Each sought her own, and the ladies were quickest at recognition. In the tumult, Gabrielle d'Estrées seized the King's arm, having long since marked him as the fourth of the seven magicians. "Sire! Let us go! My dear lord, think of Jean Chastel and his knife."

Therewith she drew him into one of the neighbouring cabinets, and promptly blew out all the tapers within reach. Not once did she let go her lord's hand, and stood between him and any onlookers, then she whispered—

"This was folly!"

"Dear lady, I had no part in the performance. I wanted to appear as a magician, that was all. The barber came on his own account. The ballet of the magicians and the barbers, though indeed carefully rehearsed, was never meant to be danced here, I do beg you to believe,"

And Henri kissed her lovely chin, leaving some shreds of mask on her curving lips.

In the meantime a strange stillness had come over the hall. The pair looked round them, but could not discover what had happened. A disguised and comically bleating voice fell upon their ears. "Soldiers—obey me ! I am a gentleman of the Court. Arrest that green lady, she has run away from me and stolen my jewels."

To which a hoarse voice replied : "The girl did well ; she has repaid herself and me. You still owe me the price of her, you old skinflint."

The green lady in question, burst into a volley of abuse ; and from the hoarseness of her voice, it could be recognized as genuine. The speech of the mob can be imitated, but not its voice. Then followed some antics between a girl of the streets, and two gentlemen, whom the King, and his lady, recognized from the manner of their talk.

"That is Monsicur de Roquelaure," said Henri.

"That is Monsieur de Varenne," said Gabrielle. And she added in a lower tone : "How dreadful !"

For she guessed, before the King realized it, that the interlude was meant as an insult. Monsieur de Roquelaure, who was of an age with the King, had been a companion of his youth, and still indulged in the freedoms of old days. . . . He does not hate me, thought the King. He is a Protestant. But he loves a jest ;—and for the sake of a sorry jest he is here betraying me to my enemies, whether consciously or not. . . .

"The pair of fools," cried Henri, and was on the point of dashing out. Gabrielle held him back.

"What can have come to Roquelaure ?" said he. "And to Varenne ? He was once go-between for you and me ; and so, from a cook, he became a rich man. And now he acts go-between as though he never were one. God help me, I think these people are all mad."

"Less mad than you think," muttered Gabrielle, leaning heavily against him. And through the mask he could

see that her eyes were veiled with tears. "My lovely one," he murmured, "my dear heart." In the face of her lamentations he felt helpless. Yonder scene was meant in jest; it was unwise to be serious about trivial matters, though they be not quite so trivial as they look.

"There is a secret door out of this cabinet," whispered Gabrielle eagerly. "If only one knew the place in the wall! Let us get out of here, my lord!"

But the knob was easily found by those who did not know it. Henri, as he tapped the panelling, moved gradually towards the door, and was several times on the point of bursting in upon those antics; for he realized the malignant insolence intended. Two soldiers of the guard had also taken part, and while the pimp set himself in a posture of defence, the pretended courtier shouted for a barber and his scissors. The girl struggled and screamed raucously. In brief, it was high time—high time, indeed, for every word uttered was more pointedly aimed at the King and his lady.

He looked round at Gabrielle; she was groping feverishly at the wall. But she no longer looked to escape by the secret passage. He must protect her, and so he would with all his might. Let him but get among them, and show himself with face unmasked.

That he would have done, but that another came first: also disguised as a magician, he was about the measure of the King, with the same quick movements, and the brawlers, open-mouthed, recognized his grip as he flung them apart. He seized the barber, knocked the knife out of his fingers, and hurled him to the floor. Varenne, the pimp, was dismissed with a kick, and the two soldiers fled without more ado. Left alone was Monsieur de Roquelaure, still bleating like a goat. But his face grew blank, when the new performer took off his mask.

It was the Count of Soissons; which was a surprise for most of the company. He had a good deal of the appearance of his Royal cousin, and was indeed not unlike him in the face; but it was a face without wit or dignity:

grim and scrociuous in that moment, and flushed from forehead to throat.

When Henri's worthy cousin had routed all the green lady's enemies, he took her fingertips, as though he were escorting a Court lady, and might have indulged in more buffoonery, but for the fact that the girl was drunk. Unluckily these villains had brought her in without heeding her condition. Her outburst of fury, and the consciousness that all eyes were upon her, made matters worse—she turned and butted into Soissons' belly, though he was posing as her cavalier. The barber, in his efforts to shave her, had loosened her wig, which fell off, and the girl was seen to be completely bald. She herself only remarked it by the burst of laughter from the Court and populace. She stood rigid, looked savagely about her, and, finding herself isolated and alone, with a wild yell vanished into the crowd.

It was a sight that distressed and disgusted the on-lookers, whether they were of the Court or from the street. Only the King could relieve this sense of outrage, and he did. In the company of Gabrielle d'Estrées, his beloved lady, he came forth from one of the neighbouring cabinets, hand in hand, and unmasked.

"You have witnessed an interlude played by my orders. I thank the charming lady, who played the drunken, shaven girl; she is, in fact, quite sober, and has lovely hair. I take pleasure in presenting her with this jewel."

This speech put the populace in high good humour, and the Court breathed again. Monsieur de Roquelaure, suddenly enlightened, approached the King, and would have fallen on his knees. His Majesty stopped him, and congratulated him on his ingenious interlude.

"And now withdraw, my friend, and shut the door behind you. Madame is tired from laughing, and needs a rest."

After a while someone ventured to open the door of the cabinet. The King and Gabrielle d'Estrées had gone, none knew how.

He accompanied her to her house nearby the Louvre.

"Sire, do not leave me. I am alone."

Henri : "Dear lady, we shall soon be united forever."

Gabrielle : "You do not think of what you say. You are telling yourself that I am hated. You have seen it for yourself."

Henri : "And I ? We are great people, and therefore defenceless. The greater we grow, the more defenceless we are."

Gabrielle : "Have we no friends ?"

Henri : "They spoil our cause, as my cousin Soissons spoiled that comic interlude."

Gabrielle : "Dear lord ! That comic interlude does not end this day."

She buried her head in a cushion, that she might not hear her own words. Thus she waited until he was gone.

In his solitary Louvre he went to bed. It was eleven o'clock, he had left the ball early. He was not yet quite asleep when Monsieur d'Armagnac came into the room.

"Sire ! Amiens."

Armagnac choked at the word, and could say no more. Henri had leapt out of bed. The fortress of Amiens surprised and taken, forty cannon lost ; and nothing, not even a river, barred the way to Paris. The enemy could march on the capital.

"He is lost," said Henri, who was in his nightshirt. And his First Chamberlain tremblingly asked—who ?

"The Cardinal of Austria."

SHOEMAKER ZAMET

Rosny in his Arsenal was awakened and summoned to the King, who was pacing restlessly up and down his little room, behind the cabinet where the birds were kept. The burning tapers did not deceive them, they still slept huddled on their perches. The King was silent ; with bowed head he shuffled to and fro in his slippers, his bed-gown dragged behind him, Several of his noblemen

stood stockstill against the walls. Not a word, not a sound. Monsicur de Rosny, as he entered, smelt disaster.

"Ha, friend ! Bad news !" cried the King in a voice that was almost a shout.

When the faithful servant learned that the city of Amiens and the fortress were taken—he could not understand. "Who has done this ? How has it happened ?"

"The Spaniards. In open daylight," said the King. "And such things happen because the towns will not admit my garrisons. Now I must go to war again—at once ; I must move at dawn. Against the Spaniards," he repeated, that none might guess what he in truth feared and foresaw : that he would have to face the Holy Roman Empire.

An intellect like his thinks correctly, but too fast ; for this was what he thought.—The German princes, whose Faith was once mine, will not now stand by me : in this he was right.—This time my whole destiny is at stake—It was so, but indeed it had always been so.—The Cardinal of Austria, a General of the Holy Roman Empire.—True, and more of them would march against him yet. But the Empire itself will not move until more than twenty years are past. You will not be there, Henri. Your part in the guidance of destiny will be the winning of those years. After you, the greatest war of all, and desolation. You will keep it from the kingdom, though you are not there in person. Your shadow keeps it at a distance, because you thought correctly, though indeed too fast. Ah well, a man seldom thinks ahead, and acts here and now.

Rosny, the perfect servant, thought and acted exclusively in the present, which was a good thing. If his master had enlarged to him about the Roman Empire, Rosny would have privily said—Nonsense ! though his face remained as stone. The King merely demanded money and cannon, for Amiens. And he had come to the right man ; Rosny had already provided for the second item. As to money, which comes first, the position was not so good. In that hour, it should have been to hand,

but for all the outgoings : relief to the peasants, loans for craftwork, and the purchase price of many towns.

The urgency of the hour moved Rosny to speak his mind. How much had been squandered on the King's building, his festivities, his passion for play ? If only they had the money lavished on his dear lady. Three tables would not hold it. He had scarce ended when she herself stood in the room. The news had been brought to her while she lay sleepless and tormented. She had put on that evening's dress, including the mask, and hurried to her lord, to share this heavy hour with him ; and looking for protection.

Henri took her hand, and with her face still masked he led her up to Monsieur de Rosny : she bowed her head gracefully, and Henri said : " Here is the lovely lady in sea-green who will provide the money for the war." He bade Armagnac dress him in the magician's costume, put on his mask, and they went out, accompanied, besides the guards, by a number of the guests at Madame's ball. The night was far advanced, but the streets were full and noisy. Henri had never seen so many beggars ; his plight sharpened his vision, the confine between glory and ruin had dwindled suddenly into a razor-edge.

The King made his way on foot, that the populace should see him and discredit the rumours of disaster ; and the nocturnal procession thus reached the Rue de la Cerisaie, and a blank wall,—behind which there might well have been nothing at all. But each and all of them knew that secluded garden, that silent house ; the King too had long since made no secret of his visits to Shoemaker Zamet. The iron gates swung open, lackeys with torches dashed through the garden, lined the approach, and lit it with a flickering glare. It was a garden in the Italian manner, more pillars than trees, more stone than grass, with temples in place of arbours, built to look like crumbling ruins. The low façade of the house was entirely encrusted with ornament ; a single jewel of many-coloured marbles. The master of that house, not less magnificently arrayed, awaited the King at the foot of the small outer staircase,

and saluted His Majesty in such a fashion that all his outspread fingers swept the flagstones.

The Marquise walked between the King and the shoemaker, who was now a rich moneylender, and only in recollection of his origin was he still called shoemaker; and three great persons entered the small, heated rooms. All three had various designs upon each other. The rooms were not merely heated, their subdued illumination and soft magnificence was a solace to the eye. The nose, too, was flattered by invisible sprays of perfume. In Zamet's house all men smelled good, but most delicious of all were the fragrant odours from a magnificent open kitchen, where the furnaces crackled, and white-clad cooks toiled for all to see.

The trio, of which each had business with the other, slowly went the round. Two wore masks, no one was called on to recognize them, and at the little tables the feasting and the play went on without a break. Henri discovered a free place among the *Prime* players. He liked *Prime* almost more than he liked *Brelan*: wherefore the crafty Zamet, a Florentine, or Levantine—no one knew what he was—had guided the King's footsteps thither, and the empty chair had been provided.

"Zamet," said Henri, in his impatience to sit in that chair, "Madame the Marquise will grant you the honour of a private conversation."

"I can scarce support such honour," stammered the little foreigner, his eyes bulging out of a face that was broader than it was long; his hips were those of a woman.

"Then try to imagine yourself a gentleman," said Henri. He was about to turn away, but pointed to several of his escort. "I have brought barbers with me. Though you are the only proper latherer here. But take notice: I am no mean magician."

So saying he hurried to his place at the table. Zamet looked the lovely mask straight in the eyes; there was an empty space around them, and he coldly asked: "How much?"

"Sebastian, I admire you," cooed Gabrielle in a whisper, laughed a pearly laugh, and bent her head backwards, disclosing a glimpse of her ravishing chin. Seeing that the bait had taken, she promptly changed her tone.

"Five sacks of gold," she said imperiously, in a voice that rang like a bell lightly struck, and bent over the little man, who recoiled—merely because she was Gabrielle, the mistress of the King of France. He really felt as though he were being crushed beneath one of his marble slabs. And in his terror, he called her Highness.

"Your Highness must first permit me to get my breath?" He gasped the words from his short thick neck, and began to retreat. She snapped her fan together and whispered :

"I have secret news. The King has beaten the Spaniards."

Then she herself turned her back.

Gabrielle chose a table where the guests were supping. After all her excitements she suddenly felt very hungry. None of the other masks recognized her, or pretended not to do so. Gabrielle talked as they did, and drank a glass of wine, for she well knew that the hottest fight was yet to come. Someone behind her whispered :

"Come !"

Gabrielle glanced over her shoulder, and waited to see who it was.

"Sagonne," whispered the mask in the sea-green dress worn by all the ladies of the Court. Gabrielle followed her to a door, behind which the lighting was even more subdued ; the room seemed empty. She did not cross the threshold. Her companion said in a quick, mysterious voice :

"Do not enter."

She said it, as though it were a matter of course that Gabrielle should be on her guard.

"People like him may be wholly trusted, how otherwise should a shoemaker grow so rich? He made soft Italian shoes for the late King, whose feet were so sensitive that

he could wear no others. Then he lent money to the noblemen, at high interest, and there was no one at the Court who was not in his debt. In the end the late King had nothing left, but Zamet disposed of all the treasures of the Kingdom abroad. Only what we women took from him remained in the country. Shoemaker Zamet has a weakness for women, Madame. . . ."

"Sagonne," said Gabrielle, interrupting her short, "spare your breath, and give me Zamet's message."

The lady stammered, then she decided to utter an indignant shriek. But Gabrielle was quicker than the shriek, and La Sagonne could only hurry after her as she disappeared. Gabrielle was careful that Henri should see her approach. All the onlookers at his table could observe his high good humour, for there were piles of gold in front of him, while his fellow players wore the unmistakable air of losers. When he saw his dear lady approaching, he closed his left eye beneath his mask. He had noticed the incident with Sagonne. Gabrielle stopped at a deliberate distance, where her lord could still hear what Sagonne was about to say. The Shoemaker's go-between would speak softly, and rely on the buzz of voices to drown what she said. But there was one with so fine an ear that he could catch whatever concerned himself. Gabrielle knew of Henri's gift, and that nothing would escape him.

Madame de Sagonne, a fragile, sharp-nosed little lady, masked, but with her thin lips uncovered, came up panting, though her agitation was as like as not assumed. "Highness," she gasped, perhaps in imitation of the Shoemaker.

"Highness. For the five sacks that he lends to the King, he wants ten repaid. I protested, I screamed like a parrot, did you not hear me scream?"

"Your voice was weak, Madam," said Gabrielle. "Half a sack was certainly meant for you."

"And a sack for you," hissed Sagonne. She was not the usual patient type of woman, set solely upon money. Zamet should have chosen a more hardened agent,

"The King would thus lose fifty thousand crowns. No!"

Sagonne had recovered her discretion. "You are rich," she lightly bent her knee and went on in a tone of eager homage. "You can offer our lord and sovereign even more than your beauty. But believe me, I do my part too. I have beaten down the Shoemaker's demand from ten sacks to seven."

"That would do—almost," said Gabrielle.

"Nay, but that is not all," said Sagonne from behind her fan. "Someone called him away. When he came back, he knew that Amiens had fallen, and was panting with rage; it will now quite certainly be ten sacks, and probably twelve to-morrow."

Gabrielle was abashed to learn how matters stood. She paused somewhat overlong before she could say what next was in her mind. This Henri noticed, and he understood her stricken silence; the tears trickled down from beneath his mask, as he swept up the gold pieces, and pushed them on to his pile.

Then with a self-command that overjoyed him, Gabrielle said :

"Sagonne, your pardon. You have this time acted as my friend. Pray now, tell Monsieur Sebastian Zamet that I would speak with him. I will even go into that ill-lit room."

"But he will not," replied the other. "He fears you more than the King. What he offers must be accepted, or the affair is at an end."

"Do what I say."

Gabrielle's tone admitted of no dispute. Madame de Sagonne led the way, though irresolutely and halting once or twice. Her demeanour warned Henri that danger was at hand. He actually beckoned to his old comrade Roquelaure, and Monsieur de Roquelaure lent his ear in most obsequious fashion. He hoped that he might now redeem his indiscretion in the matter of the interlude at the ball.

Having received his orders, he slipped quietly into

that suspect chamber, hiding behind the closed wing of the door ; the other wing stood open. Gabrielle, who made a sign to Madame de Sagonne, was about to enter ; but in the very doorway someone called her back : none other than the master of the house himself. He asked the Marquise to remain there, among the hum and clatter of the company : if indeed they were observed, a man of his sort could not be suspected of sharing any secrets with the King's beloved. And he leaned against the closed wing of the door, behind which stood Monsieur de Roquelaure. Someone else might catch the cunning Zamet, the King never would.

And Gabrielle spoke :

"Sebastian Zamet, I see that I was wrong. You are more than a money-lender, whose origin and business cannot be covered by any artifice of rank. So I will tell you the truth. Yes, the King is in a difficulty. He has lost Amiens. But he will win the war. I know what I say, and would not otherwise be ready, as I am, to pledge you all I possess."

As he stood silent and wide-eyed in admiration, she began once more.

"I have my news from the war, such as you cannot have. Wherefore I give you Monceaux, the castle and the domain, which will one day be a dukedom, as pledge and security for five sacks of gold."

Zamet had already reflected and made up his mind. This woman understood her business, that was certain. A soft heart could have helped no woman to restore a decayed and discredited family ; and she herself—what would be her future ? The word dukedom, moved him as none other could have done. He marvelled at the cold assurance of the woman, and conceived her as his equal, or indeed his better. This impression, deluded as it was, diverted his mind from the usual precautions. What message had she received from the war ? Upon what grounds did she adventure her whole estate on the highly doubtful victory of the King ?

She staked upon him because she loved him. Had his defeat been much more certain, what was solely certain was her love. Long since had she returned to her lord, and in fuller measure, what he had bestowed upon her from his heart ; Monceaux too, castle and domain, were his. And the understanding of this matter was beyond the compass of a Zamet. Monsieur de Roquelaure, behind the door, noted every word to report them for his King.

Zamet said to Gabrielle d'Estrées :

"Your property is not worth five sacks of gold, but I will lend six. Not to you, I do not want your pledge. I give them to the King, believing in his greatness. After the victory, he will remember this."

"He will indeed," Gabrielle assured him. And she tapped the Shoemaker's hand with her fan, which thrilled him with gratification, and he stood entranced, watching her depart. The money that he lent involved him in the destinies of men. And often, to his profit, he meditated on them.

At one of the card-tables she stopped, and lost, three times ; and Zamet felt a chill shiver come upon him that he could barely master. When she reached the King, he took her mask off, and his own, and said : "Behold us" ; whereupon he embraced and kissed his lady before all that company. His fellow players, who had lost all they had to him, sat before the pile of gold like waxen puppets, but Henri overturned that glittering heap ; the coins clinked pleasantly as they rolled across the table, and he said :

"Gentlemen, share it all between you. I won most of it by trickery ; I am quite sure you marked it, and made no sign, because you knew me, although you should not have known me. But if I had lost, perhaps it would have brought us ill fortune. You must know"—and here he raised his voice—"that in scarce two hours' time, I shall be leading you all to battle."

Whereat the whole company leapt to their feet and cried : "Long live the King !"

The King seldom left a company without a last jest.

The butt of it was now to be Monsieur de Varenne, once a cook, then a go-between for lovers, and last of all a nobleman ; and he was mainly responsible for the droll performance that had been intended to annoy the beloved lady. "A white apron and cap for Monsieur de Varenne," cried the King. "He shall make me an omelette."

The furnace was soon roaring and crackling in the open kitchen, where the cooking was done for all to see. Monsieur de Varenne, arrayed in white, with a cap as tall as himself, was preparing an omelette ; it was no common one, indeed he conceived it on the spur of the moment, for his honour was at stake. He shredded some orange peel into the mixture, added ginger, dashed a few drops of various strong waters into the pan—a flame shot up and fell, and the rich fragrance ravished all the onlookers. They besieged the kitchen ; but the most ecstatic admirers of the master were the cooks themselves, the head cook and his assistants. They accompanied Monsieur de Varenne in procession, as he bore the golden dish on five finger-tips to the King's table.

Monsieur de Varenne dropped on his knee, all the cooks kneeled behind him, the King took the dish from his hand, tasted the omelette, and pronounced it excellent. At this the whole company clapped their hands. Monsieur de Varenne stood up, he had recovered his fame. Some said to him : "Sir, such a thing may well miscarry. But the King would have praised you none the less. He is fond of his jest, but he never humiliates a man." Which, after all that had happened, was Varenne's opinion also.

The King and the Marquise left Shoemaker Zamet's Italian house. He took leave of his guests in such fashion that his ten finger-tips swept the flagstones of his garden—while his servants brandished their torches, and pillars and ruined temples flickered to and fro from light to darkness. In the street the horses waited, with the litter. Henri rode beside it, thrust his head between the curtains, and said :

"Dear lady, there will be no more rest for me, but

you must sleep. I shall take you to my sister Catherine, and leave you a hundred guards for your protection."

"A thousand were too few : my beloved lord, do not go without me. I am not safe here."

It was dark, but he held her hand, and felt by the touch of it how sorely she was afraid.

"It shall be as you will," he said ; "It is my will too." He heard her sigh of relief. "My heart," said he, into the darkness of the litter. Then came her voice :

"No one shall know where I am. I will travel very quietly ahead of you."

"The future Queen must not go in hiding," he replied. "You shall travel under the escort of two regiments, and with you shall travel the six sacks, which I owe to you alone."

In that same hour Shoemaker Zamet had the last fevered gamesters ushered out by his servants. The house was empty at last, and with his own hands he locked his domestics into their quarters ; then he went down into his deepest cellar, to which he alone knew the approach. Six heavy sacks he dragged, one after the other, into the upper world, holding the lantern with his teeth. He had weak shoulders and broad hips, and on the winding stairways of his three cellars, he several times collapsed ; but he got the sacks up at last.

Then he sat down on one sack, soaked in sweat, and not without fear for his life. His conversation with the great lady had been observed. Before the King's men came to fetch the sacks, robbers might seize them, after murdering him first. He had put out every light except his lantern, which he concealed behind his back, and he secured the outer door with chains as well as iron staves. During the agonizing wait, thoughts came into his mind—and they were not thoughts of satisfaction at his chivalrous behaviour, for he was utterly without faith in the King. He will not win, said Shoemaker Zamet to himself.

And he must not win. Zamet told himself he was making a gross blunder. The Florentine ambassador,

with whom he was much involved, would report to his Government that he had betrayed the Spanish cause. Which would not be true, for he was really serving it. He must serve Hapsburg, in whose domains his money lay. These Frenchmen would soon discover the might of Hapsburg and of his money. Why had he let himself be overborne into behaving like a gentleman? A man must not expect to keep clean hands in business, or he'll do none at all. Almighty God! bring this affair to a good end!

The minutes passed, they seemed like hours, and Shoemaker Zamet fell to prayer.

A shouted pass-word cut short his babble: the King's men had come.

DANGEROUS AFFAIRS

The regiments that marched ahead of the main body of the army northwards were commanded by Marshal Biron, the younger. A man without much finer feeling, he behaved in exemplary fashion to the King's beloved. He was stupid, and from mere crassness was destined to commit crimes. He was not a mean man, he was the son of a father who had been a law unto himself, and Biron the younger would have turned his troops against the King had he thought fit. But he would never have failed to respect and guard Madame d'Estrées.

Cannon in the van, then infantry, and within their ranks an iron chest on wheels, containing six sacks of gold. More cavalry, and in their midst a second treasure, a travelling coach. More infantry and another detachment of bombardiers—in such order the column marched on the first day towards Pontoise. Biron wanted to march through the night; it was for the sake of his precious charge that he bivouacked, so he declared, or pretended. Towards evening he would ride up to her coach from time to time to ask how she fared. She, too, would gladly have slept

in her coach and travelled through the night. But a tent was pitched for her.

Dawn revealed that the head of the column had been detached, under orders to march rapidly out of the Ile de France into the Province of Picardy. Gabrielle had overslept, as none of her women awakened her. She was much alarmed when she called for the Marshal and a letter was brought to her in his stead. It was couched in gallant terms, and explained that to his great regret and annoyance it could no longer be his privilege to escort the lovely lady any further. Unfortunately he had to collect the garrisons along the road and attach them to the army. But she might have perfect confidence in the loyalty of her troops. Every man would let himself be hacked in pieces in defence of the King's most precious treasure. And in conclusion Marshal Biron begged that the gracious lady would not hurry, but take her time. Several gentlemen would be soon joining her; though, in the company of her new escort, he prayed that she would still be mindful of her devoted Biron.

She enquired in vain who was expected with the army. Reckless little of the Marshal's clumsy compliment, she conceived no good could come of staying where she was. While she lay asleep, the King might well have galloped after her, in the darkness of the night and alone, to overtake her sooner; but as the lights of the camp were hidden by a copse, he might have galloped past. When he was not with her, she feared those lurking enemies who meant to trap her in the end. She was too familiar with hatred; she needed only to close her eyes, and she saw their faces: and on them her death was written. But there was yet time and to spare; she must master these forebodings. None the less, after leaving Paris, she was a different woman. Thenceforward her marriage portion was fear, never quite dispelled, and sometimes threatening to overwhelm her; only with the King's hand in her own could Gabrielle feel at ease and safe.

She gave orders to break camp, allowed no halt for the

sombre personality. He had but to open his mouth, and any such impression vanished. He spoke, not with the deep, tremendous voice expected, but with the nasal twitter of a tumbler at a fair. The shape of his mouth and a defect in his nose, prevented Monsieur de la Trémoille from speaking like a man of his rank. He made a virtue of necessity, and behaved accordingly.

Gabrielle, with her experience of men, understood how dexterously the man's voice could be used for dissimulation and infamy of every sort. This did not prevent her laughing at Monsieur de la Trémoille whenever he opened his mouth.

"But let us not forget : we desire to wait upon our most exalted lord," said de la Trémoille, whereby he made the motions of climbing, for the personage in question lived high above their heads.

Gabrielle laughed condescendingly ; the jest was little to her taste, and with every word would probably grow less so. But for her fears, she would gladly have made merry, as she used to do—how long ago !

Monsieur de Turenne reassured her by extolling the King. Wherever the King passed through upon his journey, he roused the courage of the population, strengthened their resistance, and secured the towns against the enemy. Wherefore he was naturally detained from time to time. The Marquise must be patient with him. "So must we all," he added, by which he referred to many things ; among others, to Gabrielle's marriage, and her coronation. She understood his meaning look, and faced it. As she waved her hand a second time in invitation, the haughty prince deigned to seat himself, on a chair lower than the seat of the future Queen.

"I will stand," said Monsieur de la Trémoille. "Indeed, I could not bear to sit while my lord and sovereign is so ill at ease that he must lie abed.

"Is the King ill ?" She should not have betrayed herself, but she sat up rigid in alarm, gripping both arms of her chair. The others, realizing that Gabrielle had no

news, exchanged a glance, and Monsieur de la Trémoille observed in squeaking tones :

"His kidneys. They are congested, and not to be relieved without pain." The absurd creature turned to face the wall as though he too were about to relieve his own. "O dear me," he groaned. "No use. And indeed that organ was made for nobler purposes." The dismal jester swung round, and squeaked into the lady's face : "In which matter the King is no mean performer, as is generally known."

"It is even so," she answered coolly. "And the other organ is in excellent good case. You, Sir, are lying."

"We will hope so," said Turenne, replying for his friend, who merely peered down his crooked nose. "Rumour, no doubt, speaks falsely. On the other hand, we are reminded that a King's maladies may stand in the way of his weightiest decisions."

Gabrielle listened and waited. "Often and often has he promised the throne to his dear lady," said Turenne with emphasis. "In that I can scarce be wrong. But not indeed oftener than he has promised our rights and freedoms to us Protestants, and he has not kept his word, neither to us nor to you, Madam."

"I trust him," said Gabrielle. "Trust the King, he will keep his word when the time comes."

Turenne : "The time has come. He wants to recover Amiens, and rid himself of a very noxious enemy. A Prince like myself rules in virtue of his own sovereignty, and I have allies beyond the frontier who are of my religion. I can get reinforcements for the King, or not, and I shall decide as seems due to myself and the Religion."

Gabrielle : "To yourself, I fancy."

Turenne : "Madam, do you understand your own advantage so ill as you pretend? If you would help our Religion, help yourself first."

Gabrielle : "What do you want of me?"

Turenne : "That you should speak privately to the King, and persuade him to issue an edict whereby the

Protestants are to have equal treatment with the Catholics throughout the Kingdom. They are to be allowed to hold their worship everywhere, and Mass is still to be forbidden in their fortified cities."

Gabrielle : "He never promised that."

Turenne : "But he will now act as necessity dictates."

Gabrielle : "He will not : for necessity wears your aspect, and bears your name, Monsieur de Bouillon."

Turenne : "To-day, or never, I will have the King acknowledge my sovereignty, and my domains shall be independent of his power. This is the day."

If you have but this day, my friend, thought Gabrielle, I have many—but she then and there resolved to dissemble and let the others make their move.

"Well and good," said she. "And now for myself. Where do I stand in the reckoning?"

He nodded graciously. "We are beginning to understand each other. Madame, you would ascend the throne of France. There are many who would kill you first."

And Gabrielle answered sharply : "None of my enemies is stronger than the King's good fortune. Here before Amiens the fortune of war will decide my cause."

"We decide that fortune."

Turenne looked at the lovely creature, as though he were seriously considering her fate.

"You are turning in a circle, Madam," and he wagged his head to and fro as he eyed her. "I grieve for you. You must not misconceive your party any longer, they are the Protestants. You have friends who are ready to put a hand beneath your foot, and swing you into the saddle."

Which Monsieur de la Trémoille promptly proceeded to do. He knelt, gently clasped one of Gabrielle's feet and laid it on the outstretched flat of his hand. She suffered him to do it, and for the moment she forgot her intention to remain unruffled.

"Is that true?" she asked eagerly.

The bearded buffoon lifted her foot from the palm of

his hand on to the tips of his fingers. Thence he let it drop on to his bowed head, which was almost wholly bald.

The haughty Turenne pointed a finger and merely observed : "As you see, Madam."

She pretended to be flattered and convinced, but realized that these friends were dangerous. She begged Monsieur de la Trémoille to rise from his uncomfortable attitude. He had expressed his opinion quite beyond mistake.

"The Protestants are to help me up, and I them. If I am overthrown, the blow strikes them too, and more than one head may fall." She pointed to the bald pate.

This took them both aback, and they were silent ; they had *not* looked so far ahead. But it was an intimation on which they must reflect.

"Our alliance contains dangers for both of us," she said. "Come now, we are betraying the King."

"He is betraying us and you," said Turenne, and rose to his feet. With a nonchalant salutation he half turned to go ; then he approached nearer to Gabrielle than before, and said, behind an uplifted hand, like Shoemaker Zamet :

"Madam, we take our risk. At what price do you estimate your own ? I would set it at ten thousand pounds a year. You will get this pension from the Protestant Party, and a wealthy Prince will stand security for punctual payment."

Gabrielle did not at once see how to evade this proposal. Trémoille helped her. He aped a cheap-jack at a fair, and indeed his voice was well suited to the part. "First bid eightpence halfpenny : any more offers, gentlemen !"

"You must bid higher than that," said Gabrielle decisively. And she dismissed the pair with an imperious wave of her hand ; turned away, and called her women.

At the bottom of the hill Turenne rallied his regiment before departing.

"You are right to leave nothing here," snorted Monsieur de la Trémoille through his amazing nose.

"She will not say a word to that cuckold of hers. I have a notion that she loves him, as much as Penelope did Ulysses."

"I have a notion that she is as set upon money as Monsieur de Rosny," said Monsieur de Turenne.

Both turned and looked up at the tent topped by the Royal banner.

THEY WRITE

When he was about to arrive, his lady went to meet him on horseback. While still in the saddle they embraced. But in her talk, as they rode back, there were no words of endearment.

"Sire!" Gabrielle began: "You must know that the Duke of Bouillon and other Protestant Lords will either fight for you or abandon you, according as you may act."

"They want more power, under the common pretext that their Religion needs more freedom. Be not afraid, my treasure! I am resolved to free the Religion, but these intriguers, who want more power for themselves—I'll clap them into gaol."

"Sire, be on your guard, against those of the Religion, and against me. They are my party, and will force you to make me your Queen."

He looked at her wide-eyed in admiration and amazement. So she rejected her party, and relied on him alone, and her lovely face spoke clearly of her shame and agitation.

"What then, my treasure?"

She was silent until they reached the camp. Once in her tent, she confessed:

"Sire, my beloved lord, I was to pledge myself against you for money."

"What offer did they make?" he asked; and when

she told him, he advised her to accept. When the exchequer is empty, anything is welcome.

But she dragged forth a sack, set it on the highest chair in the tent, and led her lord before it.

"I have mortgaged all I have. Shoemaker Zamet gave me this sack. I am worth no more. For what I am, I am yours until death, my lord."

This was her confession, he had never before received one like it. Just as she was sinking to the ground, he clasped her in his arms. He pushed the sack on to the floor, which jingled as it fell ; and lifted Gabrielle into its place.

Rosny also brought money to carry on the war, though in somewhat different fashion. Every month, so long as the siege of Amiens and the campaign continued, Monsieur de Rosny appeared with one of those elaborate escorts he affected, having collected another hundred and fifty thousand crowns ; from members of the Parliament, rich noblemen, prosperous burghers, and especially from the tax-farmers. These he threatened with an investigation of their affairs by a Chamber of Justice, and they complied at once. The imposing procession, with a strong detachment to guard the treasure, could then move off,—cannon, infantry, more cannon, Monsieur de Rosny in a square of streaming banners, cannon in front of him, the chest behind him, and he the master over all. He wore light armour, and round his neck a lady's lace cravat, and his golden scarf was caught over the shoulder by a large and glittering brooch.

He told the King of the attempts to bribe him. He himself was armed against them, others less so. Even the beloved lady's aunt, Madame de Sourdis, had accepted jewellery from a Treasury agent, who had also been insolent enough to slip into Madame de Rosny's hand a diamond worth six thousand crowns. He would never dare to do that again. He had taught that villain a prompt lesson. Quite apart from money, Henri owed everything to his faithful servant, and indeed without him could scarce have survived. Monsieur de Rosny made contracts with

slaughterers and kept twenty thousand men in rations. Monsieur de Rosny established well equipped ambulances with the armies, which had never been seen before, and saved countless lives.

To clip his pride a little, Henri had to remind this incomparable servant that the King himself would not be alive but for the act of a simple soldier. His countryman, a Gascon, who had somehow come among the defenders of the fortress—had shouted from the walls: "Hey! Miller of Bubaste!" So he was often called in his native land. "Take care! The Cat's going to kitten!" yelled the Gascon in his own speech, which only Henri understood. Whereby he realized that he was standing on a mine, which would have blown him to pieces had he not leapt aside.

As he was alive and sat a horse, he took Amiens at last, after three months' siege, not reckoning his journeys to Paris, where he had to talk like thunder and lightning to put heart into his capital. The Cardinal—Archduke Albrecht of Austria,—was first defeated, then Amiens fell. He was defeated and driven out of the kingdom, never to set eyes on it again: this through the inherited art of a commander, who had learned, like Parma, to evade the more hazardous encounters. He wore down the enemy in trenches and redoubts by means of mines and counter-mines. But when reinforcements for the Cardinal came from the Netherlands, he was already weakened, he let himself be defeated and withdrew. The help sent was meagre. Why was it so? Henri had, a while ago, conceived the entire Roman Empire arrayed against him: but that hour was passed.

Nothing had happened except that he had recaptured one of his cities, and inflicted a defeat on old Don Philip: it would be the last, the old potentate now wanted to make peace.—Peace. For six and twenty years it had barely held, or not at all: it was and was not, or it was broken. But now it should be inscribed upon paper, and made inviolable, even by the mightiest armies. It would be sealed: and

the honour of Kings would flow into that burning wax. And it would be sworn, in the name of God.

But what is to be sacred and inviolate calls for due procedure. Until the envoys with their commissions and their mandates were on their way, and the negotiations could begin, King Henri awaited them in much uneasiness of mind. Would Hapsburg really abandon his ancient adversary Philip, long enough and too long the ruler of the world? In the meantime, he received reports on the progress of the envoys hour by hour, and every day he acted so that his victory should be the decisive and undisputed fact.

While still in his camp before Amiens he appointed Rosny Grand Master of the Artillery : not without pressure put on him by the best of all his servants. His services left the King no choice, nor his acid expression when he pointed out that he was still without rank and office : Intendant-General of Finance, without the title, while the Grand Master of Artillery was Monsieur Jean d'Estrées, a useless old gentleman, but the father of the King's mistress. She was delighted when the King bought the Grand Mastership from her father. It was a great sum, and all went into the pockets of the family ; which provided the best of servants with fresh matter for reproach against Gabrielle. She had hoped to mollify him : no, her complaisance made Monsieur de Rosny even more hostile, and opposition on her part would have done the same.

But the King, while still before Amiens, created his beloved Duchess of Beaufort. That was the ratification of his victory, and a public testimony that there was but one step now between his beloved and the throne. His happiness was high : hers was not unclouded. Perils continued to gather round her ; she felt the touch of evil hands. She could not pass a day without the King, and yet she would not confess her fears. He had his time of joy, of swift and easy ascent towards greatness and possession. And yet, the poor lovely creature knew but too

well there were those that looked on him askance. He was on his guard, as she was, and picked his way with care. But true it was that he had won ; no one could prevail against him now.

Henri wrote : " Brave Crillon, hang yourself for not having been here near me last Monday, on the finest occasion that has ever been seen, and which, perhaps, will never be seen again ! The Cardinal came to see us in great fury and has gone off in great shame. I shall not stay in Amiens, as I have a matter in hand."

Gabrielle wrote : " Madame, my true friend. Your dear brother, my beloved lord, is the mightiest King on earth. If it so be that his capital misconceives me, and I am named by a certain name at Court, believe me, I do not deserve the insult. Madame, I shall ever do my utmost to reconcile the King with the Duke of Soissons, with whom he has fallen out. Our friend was ill advised, when he took away his troops from the Royal army, and withdrew before the battle, together with the Duke of Bouillon, who is a bad Protestant. Otherwise he would be loyal, as you are. And now, Madame, tell me if you please : How do you mean to receive me, and are you my true friend ? "

Catherine wrote—but nearly dropped her pen in horror. She had almost written : " Duchesse d'Ordure ", the name by which Gabrielle was commonly known, and the people thought it witty. Gabrielle was not hated equally by all. Some merely repeated what seemed amusing or was in the fashion. Others saw no reason to draw enmity upon themselves by upholding an unpopular cause. The more prudent avoided the offensive title. Madame de Sagonne contented herself with making a wry face when the talk turned on Gabrielle ; but only for a moment. There was no attempt as yet to hound her down. Indeed, the more sagacious foresaw a fresh honour for the beloved lady very soon. She would take half the last step, but not the whole of it. Better not set people by the ears too soon !

Catherine wrote : " Madam, Duchess of Beaufort, my dear friend. I am so delighted with you that I can scarce await your return to kiss you on both cheeks. You have so dealt with my dear brother the King, and so advised him, as I should have done myself. You make no boast of it, but I know how you treated Monsieur de Bouillon. I know too that just after that unworthy Protestant departed he summoned another and a better one. I speak of Monsieur de Mornay ; his new favour with our sovereign is your work. Dearest, you do not know it. For you are pure in heart, and when you serve the Religion, you do not reckon your advantage. But you must do two things : you must pray and you must keep an eye to your advantage. I would have you know that the Princess of Orange is here, living quietly in my house. She has been through so much trouble and strife, that I regret my errors in her presence, though they were part of me and I could not help them. I have not seen the Count of Soissons for a while past ; he is sorely grieved to have left the King with his troops before Amiens. We are weak. But Madame d'Orange, who is a devout and resolute lady, calls my friend Gabrielle a good and virtuous Christian."

The King wrote : " Monsieur du Plessis ! The King of Spain wants to make peace with me, and he does well. I defeated him with twenty thousand of my troops, four thousand of which were Englishmen, thanks to the good will of their Queen, Elizabeth. But it was fortunate that I had someone, Monsieur de Mornay, who possessed her confidence as he did mine, and could bring us together once more. In token of my confidence I now send you into my province of Brittany, that you may persuade Monsieur de Mercœur to treat with me. He cannot last long, his people are deserting him. He can now get money from me for surrendering my Province ; but not after my peace with Spain,—I shall then come with the army. Show your art, you were always my diplomatist—you even guessed what I thought about the Religion, and how I was very soon to act. When someone stabbed me in the

lip, you took it as a warning. Let us believe it so, especially as it proved not to be the only one ; but though I try to think and act as a reasonable man should, certain happenings do seem to give the lie to reason. When I rode into my city of Amiens, I passed a gallows by the roadside, and on it hung the body of a man long since executed. But, in my honour, he had been clad in a white shirt. A mouldering corpse arrayed for the Day of Resurrection. I kept my countenance : not so Marshal Biron : strong as he is, he was fairly overcome by the sight of that hanged man. He had to pull his horse in beside a house, where he leaned from the saddle against the wall and fainted."

THE PROTESTANT

Mornay himself had been resurrected, and some recoiled from him, as did Biron from the body in the clean shirt. Mercœur, the last of the House of Lorraine, which still held the power in a part of the Kingdom, surrendered it ; first because he could no otherwise, for though he talked menacingly of Spanish landings on the coast, he well knew that he would await them in vain. But Mercœur, when confronted with Mornay, was to throw away his power sooner than he need have done. As yet, the Royal envoy had not reached the castle, Mercœur was hourly awaiting him. Mornay had transformed little Navarre into a great King—in so far as Henri had not done so by his own efforts. But that was what a Lorraine was ill disposed to admit. He much preferred to ascribe the achievement to Mornay's extraordinary gifts. He had managed to placate the Queen of England after her angry abandonment of her disloyal companion in the Faith—what arts would he now use to conjure back the vanished company of the dead ? But a little while, and Admiral de Coligny, the victims of Saint Bartholomew, and the fallen Huguenots of the ancient battles, would rise out of their graves. And why not ?—for the survivors had been

equally engulfed, and the fortunes of the Protestants had seemed to be destroyed for ever.

But now he had summoned Mornay, and that was the beginning. The converted heretic was no doubt intent upon bestowing rights upon the Protestants, the like of which they had never so much as claimed before his day. And who could say him nay?—he was the conqueror of Spain. First he would set heresy on high, and then grant a peace to His Catholic Majesty.

The Duke of Mercœur conceived all this as plainly monstrous, in contravention of all good order and sacred privileges, and also as more or less inexplicable, if not devilish. A King overthrows many things in his course of conquest. Venerable institutions—he sweeps them on one side; great families, and even the House of Lorraine, he passes over them; over Guise, the favourite of the people, over fat Mayenne, and now over Mercœur, on this distant headland where he had dwelt so long that he had come to think himself eternal, like the ocean, and the Power that ruled the world. But that Power was now seen to be transitory; he grew doubtful of himself; may be the ocean too would soon withdraw, and leave that castle high and dry.

But the waves still surged and thundered round the rocks, on which the castle stood, and poured through iron gratings into its deepest dungeons. The master of that Castle opened the window; he liked the uproar of his sea, it should remind him of what he was when the Protestant with his Royal escort entered that room. The Duke had made his preparations; to match the envoy's escort, just so many of his own people should march in through the doors on both sides of the room. He was master of that sea, and a man in authority, and own brother to Montpensier, the Fury. At that moment he noticed his chamberlain making signs to him from without, and the door slowly closed. Mercœur swung round; in the room stood one person only, the Protestant.

Mornay stood calmly observant while the great lord

though against the light, blinked at him. Mercœur soon recovered his composure, surveyed his visitor, and beckoned him to approach. Mornay waited until the Duke was seated ; then he moved the proffered chair in such a fashion that he would not face the light. The Duke was compelled to follow him, so that neither had the advantage of position. But Mercœur reflected that the dash of waves might well fluster his visitor and put him at a disadvantage. He let the Protestant speak awhile ; he placed his hand to his ear, and Mornay promptly stopped.

He waited. The window was not shut. Mornay eyed Mercœur, and Mercœur eyed his visitor. A man who had spent his life about the Courts of Europe, a man before whom, in a memorable hour, the great Queen had showed herself a woman, was not likely to be so daunted. A man who feared God would fear little else ! His forehead had broadened, as the growth of hair receded ; it was now larger than his face, but still quite unwrinkled, the glory of heaven was mirrored on its smooth expanse. The God of Monsieur Du Plessis de Mornay did not love lined foreheads. A thatch of hair was combed across his head, and two locks were wound about his ears, according to the custom of the older Protestants in their great days. King Henri used to wear them thus.

The man was clothed in black and white plumage like all these ravens. A distinguished figure, withal. Choice stuffs, slashed doublet, cut low at the neck—and surely a cross worked into the velvet, black on black, in rich but delicate embroidery ; but unmistakably a cross. How deal with such a man ? Insolent these people were, but, alas, there were situations that forbade even a Prince to chastise their insolence. As for instance by dropping them through the floor of that apartment into the dungeon below. The tide would in the meantime have filled it up to the neck of a man upright—thought the Duke amid the desolate booming of the sea, that had made him what he was.

He wished he knew whether the Protestant was smiling.

Brow and eyes set in gravity inviolable ; all the more disturbing was that thin wrinkle down the cheek, and perhaps carried with it a suspicious smile. The wrinkle ran from the nose, the tip of which was red, down to the grey tuft on the chin ; which was exactly adjusted to the gap in the white ruff. He wished he knew whether the redness of the nose was due to catarrh or wine ; and especially whether the Protestant was smiling. There was something magical behind that menace. The Duke of Mercœur felt utterly exposed ; he was indeed deluded by certain superstitious notions of the spiritual gifts of the Protestants. There was something uncanny about them all. And this man was known as their Pope.

As the window was not shut, Monsieur de Mornay began his speech again from the beginning. He merely thought that his baffled adversary was making matters as difficult for him as he could. A practised speaker, after many successes in the stormy councils of his co-religionists, could of course, by his mere art, carry his voice without an effort against the uproar of the sea. Monsieur de Mercœur soon realized that, though with but little interest. Whether sooner or later, he would have to yield and resign his authority : the only issue was the price. But something else disquieted him more.

"Have you not a God of your own ?" asked the great nobleman, who had grown old upon this sea-girt headland.

To which Mornay answered equably :

"My God is the only living God."

"Does he reveal himself ?" asked Mercœur.

"It is He that supports me now and always," said Mornay. He spoke soberly and without a hint of challenge, for he had never conquered otherwise than by the truth ; by it he had never failed to conquer, even the mightiest enemy that did not possess it. The last of the House of Lorraine, who was still a man of might, lifted to him an unbelieving face ; this troubled Mornay, and distressed him for the unbeliever's sake. Wherefore he produced arguments from his own theological writings ; never had he spoken

at such length before. In the end he passed from eternal to temporal matters. The civil war in France had from the start been an opportunity for ambitious foreigners, not to mention a temptation for half-Frenchmen—such as the House of Lorraine—he implied, and Mercœur understood him, though no name was uttered. This flung him into a sudden fury, which would not indeed have been so violent, had it not been roused by his superstitious fear of the Protestant. To the dungeon with him!—urged the furious voice within, while he presented an unruffled countenance. But he was very near to touching the hidden mechanism that would open the trap-door.

Mornay, in the simplicity of his heart, believed he had made a deep impression on the enemy of the Religion and the King, in matters both spiritual and secular, to the glory of God, and for the good of public order. Monsieur de Mercœur's face had changed, all the unrest and secret bitterness had faded out of it, and the great noble looked at him in such frank and kindly fashion—so Mornay thought: while Mercœur, in his evil heart, was savouring his agonizing death by slow drowning in the flooded dungeon.

But there was one thing of which he wanted to be certain first.

“Does your God still work miracles? Have miracles ceased with the Bible, or does he continue them among you?”

“The goodness of the Lord endureth for ever,” said the Protestant. For the first time in that room he bowed his head, by way of consolation to a penitent.

At this, the Duke's face darkened. The fellow might well escape out of the dungeon. An angel might swing back the grating, he reflected, and he took his hand from the mechanism. Moreover—though Monsieur de Mercœur did not mark this at once, Mornay had, in all innocence, so shifted his chair, that the Duke had had to move after him; and would, at that moment, have dropped through the floor together with his victim.

That day they talked no more ; and in the days that followed, the Duke of Mercœur raised more difficulties than he had contemplated. He took heart again. The town of Vervins lay on the further side of the Kingdom, in the Dukedom of Guise, where the House of Lorraine had its origins. At Vervins it seemed that the Spaniards had finally admitted defeat, and proclaimed under hand and seal that this Kingdom would never be theirs in the centuries to come, nor could be, with the will of God. Mercœur was well served with news, which convinced him that the House of Hapsburg was more distinguished for diplomacy than generalship.

Whereupon he fell into a fury with himself because one afternoon he had let himself be daunted by the Protestant Mornay—really, in fact, by the heretic Henri : and had not then ventured to drown his visitor. The man was an emissary from his master, and, moreover, had perhaps been entrusted with yet higher powers. Higher powers ! That remained to be seen. At Vervins, at least, the Protestant God was not yet made manifest, nor had he revealed his purposes—thought the Duke of Mercœur to himself in those days. But he ought to have drowned that Protestant ; to this conviction he obstinately came back, for the solitary turmoil of the elements had made him what he was.

Towards the end of October, Mornay found himself at Angers. Marshal Brissac, humanist and catcher of flies, had summoned several noblemen to that town that they might approve the dispositions he had made against the imminent arrival of the King. Henri was about to journey into his Province of Brittany by way of Saumur and Angers. The Governor of Saumur was Monsieur de Mornay, the Marshal commanded a Royal garrison at Angers. All the more shocking was what befel the Royal Governor in the King's city of Angers, almost under the eyes of the Marshal, who was related to the author of the deed.

A certain Monsieur de Saint Phal fell in with Monsieur

de Mornay, Governor of Saumur ; in the open street of Angers, while Mornay was talking to a magistrate. He had with him an equerry, his majordomo, but no escort other than a secretary and a page. Saint Phal was guarded by ten armed men, whom he at first kept out of sight. He complained to the Governor of Saumur in the matter of certain intercepted letters, which the Governor had had opened. The complaint was provocative, but Mornay made a temperate reply. He had opened the letters, as they had been found upon a suspected person ; but when he came upon the signature of Monsieur de Saint Phal, he had sent them on. He then expressed some surprise ; for the event was five months old.

This plain statement had no effect upon the other, who grew the more truculent and refused any explanation. "Very well," said Mornay, in the end. "I am accountable to none but the King. You, Sir, may at any time make the matter an affair of honour."

Saint Phal, as though this had been the expected cue, drew a stick from beneath his cloak, and his ten armed men appeared, under cover of whom the assailant was able to mount his horse and escape. Mornay, a man advanced in years, was struck down by a blow on the head.

A wave of excitement swept over the western Provinces. No one believed in any personal quarrel between the two gentlemen. The so-called Pope of the Huguenots was to be put out of the fight by a premeditated attack : then the King would scarce venture on his journey, and would refrain from giving the Protestants their constitution. Otherwise all was in readiness for a settlement ; at their Church councils and political assemblies the Religion and the Party had prescribed their conditions to the King ; they were extreme, and Mornay had induced the King to accept them. The blow on the head came at the eleventh hour, that the realm might be spared this outrage by the party of revolt.

On their side, those that shared the victim's faith told each other that there must be no more concessions, they

had made too many hitherto. Remained to them only their strong places and a fresh conflict. So matters stood when Mornay, still sorely stricken, received a letter from the King : in which the King said that he felt the injury in his own person, both as King and as Mornay's friend. "As King, I will see that justice is done to us. Were I but a friend, I would draw my sword."

They were words of indignation and impatience scarce now to be restrained. Life steps quickly forward ; but just as a visible height stands up to justify of this life and this realm, the movement suddenly halts, as at Verbins, and in Brittany ; and peace with those of the Religion recedes yet further, in consequence of a broken head.

Marshal Brissac received an order to deliver up his brother-in-law, Saint Phal, to the Police Lieutenant of the King—"promptly, and without pretext for procrastination, for what has happened struck me to the heart ; it touches my authority and the Royal service."

None knew that better than Brissac, catcher of flies ; and he approached the sick Mornay's couch with a fervour of satisfaction the like of which he had seldom known.

"Our master suffers more than you, my honoured friend," said Brissac with the face of an Apostle painted by an adept. One could almost see the saintly beard, and he kept his eyes upturned like a martyr's to the clouds.

"I offer myself," he said piously, "for imprisonment, that your wrong may be avenged, and the King's will done. Better my own sacrifice, than to stand by helpless."

"You are not helpless," said Mornay. "You are a hypocrite. You hid your kinsman from the King. He has taken refuge in one of Monsieur de Mercœur's towns. There's an intriguer for you, though he will not last long, and is scarce worth your pains."

"What am I ?" asked Brissac, and shuddered with horror. "You do not believe such a thing. Look at me, and dare to repeat your words."

Mornay did not repeat them, his contempt overcame his anger. Brissac in the meantime managed to grow as

pale as a dying man, his eyes rolled upwards, and the crown of thorns appeared about his head. Mornay eyed the performance with disgust. And Brissac thought to himself: why not impersonate a devil out of Hell, tip this Protestant raven off his branch, and kill him. Should he? It was not without difficulty that he suppressed the temptation.

Why heed so lost a creature, said Mornay to his soul. For a hypocrite, and a man of many faces, he regarded as beyond redemption. Since the assault upon himself, he had also changed his view of Monsieur de Mercœur. Yes, he was always too hasty in his judgments, because he regarded his equals as amenable to reason, now even more so than in his youth, for so the years weaken our confrontation of the world. None the less he felt that the great Duke was nearer to God's image than the meaningless nonentity who stood there grimacing by his couch.

Mornay effaced the nonentity from his mind, and went on as though he were addressing an automaton. He named the conditions under which he would forget his injuries; a satisfaction in so ceremonial a form that it would leap to the eyes of everyone. Monsieur de Saint Phal was to kneel before him. At this, Marshal Brissac forgot himself, and cried, in an impulse that did him some credit:

"God bless my soul, Sir! I would recommend you to wait upon him, and he will offer you his excuses, if not in this unusual fashion. Pray who may you be, after all?"

"The King's deputy—we await the King here, and he will know where to find a man like Saint Phal, and punish him."

"I doubt it," observed Brissac. "Do not forget that, but for me, he would never have marched into his capital."

For what remained to be said, Mornay turned to the wall, no longer to his adversary. He saw indeed how right the King was to insist on due obedience and service to the Crown, and on the honour of a nobleman. For the rest, let Marshal Brissac protract the matter as he could.

In the end, Saint Phal would find himself under lock and key. Mornay swore to that.

Brissac departed without another word ; the obduracy of a Protestant is more formidable than his religious zeal. A broken head aroused nothing less than the "Anger of the Lord". Well, they would be given a lesson. Mornay should be led by the nose, and made ridiculous. All the better if the King were likewise involved. He would hesitate, and postpone the Edict.

CONVERSATIONS

The difficulties were indeed burdensome. Mornay had scarce left his room when he had to explain to his Church, and convince his own heart, that—before God—he asked no more from the King than he could grant without damage to his interests. "And what if he dies?" asked one Pastor Béraud, who came to Saumur to wait on the Governor at the instance of the Church Assembly.

Mornay bowed his head, looked up, and answered quietly :

"So long as he lives, the Edict as he intends it, will suffice."

After that, he said no more upon the matter, but thought : Let the dead bury their dead. It is meet that the living should think us obstinately set upon our faith and upon our honour. He knew too well what it had cost to bring about that hour of life. Let the dead bury their dead. When Mornay cited these words from Holy Writ, he meant them in all piety, and also as an utterance of statesmanship.

He made his way to Paris with Madame de Mornay. Both were received forthwith, Madame de Mornay in the house of the King's sister, where two other ladies appeared with her, the Duchess of Beaufort and the Princess of Orange. The King gave audience to Monsieur de Mornay, although he was expecting the Papal Legate.

When Henri saw his Philip Mornay enter the room, he could not at once embrace him, as his impulse was ; this was a figure that he did not know. Only suffering, not the passage of the years, can transform a man's face in this fashion.

"Philip," said Henri, "I will listen to every plaint that you may make. You have been abominably used, and I, too, in your person. Let it be some consolation that the day at last has come when I can establish the Religion in its rights."

"Sire," said Mornay in a feeble voice, "I am quite sure that you will keep your word, and bestow upon the Religion the same freedom and rights that it possessed now nearly a generation ago."

"I cannot restore you more than you lost by Saint Bartholomew," said Henri ; and Philip replied : "I know."

Both made a gesture of renunciation. After a pause, the diplomat respectfully proposed that his co-religionists should, as they desired, be granted six members on the Edict Council of the Parliament. "Which gives you no majority on a Council of sixteen," Henri interposed.

"Wherefore we suggest that Your Majesty should appoint the ten Catholics yourself. Sire ! Our trust is in you alone."

"Not in your fortresses, nor yet in the Edict ?"

"In you and in none other."

Henri asked no more questions, he embraced his old friend, indeed he had never clasped him so long and warmly in his arms. And in his ear he said :

"We must live for ever."

And in the other ear, after kissing Mornay upon both cheeks, the King said :

"Otherwise, after our time my Edict will become no more than a blank sheet of paper."

"We cannot know what is to be," said Mornay simply. "In my zeal for the Religion I had forgot that our deeds scarce outlive us. We ask and ask and are never sated, and would establish freedom of conscience as an eternal

law. But it perishes with us, and our successors must win it anew. So wills the Lord of human destinies."

"What did he do to you?" asked Henri—took a step back and eyed the man before him; he had looked unfamiliar as he entered the room. Mornay suddenly grew vigorous and insistent:

"Sire, he struck me on the head, and the blow is not yet avenged."

Henri: "It shall be avenged; upon my word."

Mornay: "It irks me that you let time pass, and my enemies deride me."

Henri: "Friend, the delay over the Edict has vexed you less than your broken head."

Mornay: "Sire, the blow touched my honour."

Henri: "You were knocked down, but the Religion stands."

Mornay: "Without honour there can be no advantage. Though nothing remains of what we shall have done, we shall have done it in all honour; and through it our name will live."

No answer. Henri reflected how often this man had lied and intrigued on his behalf—in all innocence, and yet as was needful in this world. One may go, and the other not. I reached the height I aimed at with that inner constancy that is my honour. The straight way would be more than honour, it would be a miracle. I evade my murderers, and I forget a broken head. Revenge—is a heavy charge upon what will be afterwards called greatness. Revenge—

"Monsieur de Mornay, you are a nobleman, and your nobility outruns your wisdom. I see it well. Have you not understood that our vengeance can humiliate none other so sorely as ourselves?"

To which Mornay, a pious Protestant, replied:

"Sire, Monsieur de Saint Phal must be gaoled, and must ask my pardon."

"Very well," said Henri. "You shall have your will."

Wherewith he dismissed his old comrade, for he heard the rumble of the Legate's coach.

Henri did not go out to receive the Legate, he left the room by the opposite door. Nearby there was a view on to the Tuileries, and into his sister's windows. The window that he had in mind, was but lightly curtained, and he recognized the shadows on it ; four of them. The ladies are a-quiver over me, he thought. They are gathered together, praying that I may stand fast. Never fear, Catherine, this time I am master. Princess of Orange, my hour is at hand, this day there's no murderer in my kingdom that dare raise a knife against me ; he could not help but turn it on himself.

Striding—nay, almost leaping—back, he reached the room before the Legate. He left the door open behind him : those four shadows should be present at the interview. Madame de Mornay, he thought, pray less for me than for your vengeful husband who will avoid the Papal Legate, lest he might, for reasons of state, be tempted to kiss his ring.

Outside, the tramp of the guards was heard, and the door swung open. And Henri thought : Gabrielle, my dearest lady ; look on me. If I withstand this trial, then you too have conquered. Pray with the three Protestants, that you may become Queen.

The Legate stepped into the doorway : but no further. He waited where he stood for the King to come and kiss his ring. The Legate had come with a large escort, which seemed to float upwards out of the stairway like a lustrous cloud ; and, with all the motley array of ecclesiastics and soldiers, and some boys among them, the cloud that accompanied the Legate was a little dazzling. He himself presented the figure of a frail and humble old man, who raised a wavering hand as though it were his wearisome and constant duty. But the King kissed the ring with fervour, whereupon he stepped backwards into the middle of the room. There it was now for him to wait. The escort melted noiselessly away, in the manner of a cloud, and the door, as the Legate noticed with disquiet, was shut.

He wished he could look round. Was he really alone with the King ?

It is unpleasant and a little unsafe to enter the cell of a condemned man, especially for a vivacious old gentleman, with an insatiable taste for intrigue, but not given to contemplating his own end. Malvezzi, in Brussels, said that the King of France must die. And the Legate reflected that as the door was now shut, there was nothing for it but to move forward with appropriate dignity. This he did, with eyes fixed upon the King, and his heart went out to Henri with every step he took. True, the King was a rebel, a heretic, an incorrigible destroyer of the Faith and the divine order, yet his face, in these ordeals, was stamped with dignity and race ; no shapely boy nor pious Christian could ever look like that. What a pity ! Malvezzi, the Legate in Brussels, had been plotting his death for five years past. Which was barbarous, although possibly just, for this King was working for his own overthrow. The other Legate was but pushing at a falling man. He wished he could stop him. . . .

The Legate sat down, and so, but not till then, did the King. The Legate congratulated the King on his victory over the Cardinal of Austria.

"Over Spain," said Henri quickly ; "Over Hapsburg."

The Legate paused before he said :

"Over Christianity ?"

"I am a Christian King," said Henri. "The Pope knows it ; the pledges that I offer cost me the fruits of my victory. I make peace, but I could carry the war across the Rhine."

"If you could do so, you would. Only too glad to get peace with your secular enemies, you attack the Church."

"God forbid," exclaimed Henri.

"Pledges !" The Legate raised a warning hand : "You would do well to grant none to your Protestants, and especially not the most vital ones. That will lead you further than you intend, and may be dangerous. You have risen high, you are a conqueror and a great King.

Now show your greatness and recognize the limits of your power."

"Solemn words," said Henri, "for much too small a matter. I have let it be understood in Rome that my Protestants will get nothing but a sheet of paper. Indeed they expect no more, poor souls. The best informed of them is my brave Mornay, who kissed your ring. I have told him so myself. They know me. Why am I not believed by Rome alone?"

"Because Rome knows you better."

This answer from the Legate followed an oppressive silence. The king got up, and began to pace the room with ever slackening strides. At the further end by the open door, he lingered for a moment, to glance at the window in his sister's house. Of the four shadows, three stood quite still, watching the movements of the fourth.

CONFESSIONS

Yonder in that room each of the four women took up the tale in turn, unburdening her heart. They sat round a table, on which lay a book. At the beginning, they were agreed that the King's heavy hour was upon him, and that they must send him their help across the space between. Let us confess ourselves, for what we are. The truth alone can help, both us and him. Let us be truthful. He will feel it, and will do likewise.

Madame de Mornay, as the lowest in rank, was to speak first. She recoiled, said, "I am not worthy," and laid her hand on the book to reassure herself. She was gaunt in person, clad in black, and wore a coif: but a few errant strands of hair betrayed that it had once been red. Her skin was coarse, and, at fifty, it was now a lifeless white. The veins on her outstretched hand were blue and swollen. Her eyes were the same watery blue, but such was her self-mastery, that they looked beyond the other women into the unseen. If Madame de Mornay had recognized

the King across the courtyard, she forgot the fact at once, by the mere exercise of her will.

"I am a Christian," said she, and the four words seemed to come from her very soul. She had an ungracious voice, her face was over-long, it had aged like that of her husband, but was still unwrinkled, and the moving lips looked dry and harsh. All this the three women did not fail to mark; and yet the voice of a soul unburdening itself, with all its weaknesses and transgressions, rang in their ears with a grave melody all its own.

"I am not so much a Christian through my faith, as by reason of my sins. I was vain, and my piety was worldly; it was false, like the curls I wore. When the Pastors forbade me to wear them, I was angry, instead of thanking Him who sent me their counsel. The affliction that He put upon me"—she avoided the name of the Lord; "Indeed, affliction made me no better either. We are irreclaimable; we are destined to sin much or little, or not at all, or to our eternal damnation."

She cast down her eyes; but as she had done so involuntarily, she swiftly glanced at the window opposite.

"I possess a gift for persuasion. At the instance of Monsieur de Mornay I used my influence upon persons whose suspicions he had reason to fear. I had many successes, and they corrupted me. Such talents do corrupt. Who are we, that we should drive others to despair for the sake of worldly advantage? I know of one Prince who lost everything through me and fled into exile. I, who escaped from exile! I was meddling with a Power that was minded to deliver me, but not to bring others to destruction. I did not think of this, while the palpitations at my heart grew worse, and no mountain waters that I drank or bathed in could bring me relief. For it was the warning of my conscience, as I last understood, when I fell into a very abyss of fear."

The moving shadow yonder was the King. Madame de Mornay saw, and was grieved to see, how he squandered his great qualities, for we do so all the time—whereas we

should be frank and honest, at the risk of mortal peril. Monsieure de Mornay's skill at handling men, made him first proud, then actually revengeful. He, at least, is saved by the virtue that abides secluded in his mind, and cannot be tainted by worldly dealings. Act he may and does ; but he reflects likewise. He was the first layman to write upon religion. In his books he combats all that this world implies, in allegiance to his fellow-men, and to Him who sees us all ; he spends hours at his table, writing ; there is he free, and there he brings forth the best that is in him.

She opened the book beneath her hand. "Tractate on the Eucharist," she said.

"What !" cried the Princess of Orange. She had been silent long enough, although she had not been wearied. She was never wearied, neither in company nor alone.

"So that is the Tractate ! All Europe has been waiting for it. Here is the book : why has it not come into our hands ?"

"Is it true," asked Madame, the King's sister ; "that this book so discredits the Mass that the Pope himself will refuse to say it ?"

"Mass will continue to be said," replied the other Protestant : but gave no further explanation. Then turning to the Princess of Orange :

"Madame d'Orange," said she to the buxom little woman with round eyes, grey hair, and girlish skin, "you are the most truly Christian of us all. You are so enwrapped in virtue that my last avowal cannot reach you, though in your great goodness you had been willing to receive it. This book must not be known before the King has issued the Edict. The Edict first : for, after the book, we shall get no more. The book will do us wrong ; indeed, to admit the truth, we shall suffer for it."

"No," said the Princess. And she added lightly to her pale and anguished companion. "We are fortunate, in that the truth helps us alone. Whatsoever may fall away and perish, we remain. For we are gathered here that we may stand by the King, as we are and confess

ourselves to be, and he hears us yonder with an inward ear. In proof of which his beloved is with us, and shall be Queen."

Her bright eyes rested upon Gabrielle, who blushed, and broke into a faint, deep sob. She felt desolate among these Protestants, and yet they were all the friends she had. Much of what they said she had not understood. Self-examination and confession were beyond her compass and they frightened her. And yet, under the look that Madame d'Orange now gave her, she pleaded softly that she would try, for she had matters to confess.

"My dear child, first dry your eyes. Our eyes must be dry when we confess." The Princess interposed less by what she said than by her smile. It was a firm and understanding smile that went straight to the heart. Gabrielle thought Madame d'Orange angelic. Only beings of another origin than ours could smile with such understanding. A quick impulse seized her, and she bent to kiss the Princess of Orange's hand, but before she could do so, the Princess laid a protecting arm round her shoulder ; and she signed to the sister of the King to speak.

THE LEGATE'S SPEECH

Henri again looked at the Legate and left the word with him. Does Rome know me better than I know myself? And the Legate spoke. The voice that came from his meagre person was soft and full. His withered countenance had long been accustomed to remain impenetrable ; the man's quick changes of expression had never blunted his natural force. Moreover his eyes spoke too. There was little recognition in them, but rather a sort of avid vitality, that to certain kinds of men seemed shameless, and not a little shocking. But he was the Legate of the Pope.

The King flung in a brief word or two, which made no difference to what the Legate said. Protestations and assurances.—"The most loyal son of the Holy Father.

—Only a sheet of paper.—Peace of the world.—Secure establishment of Christendom.”—The Legate was unimpressed, and made his warning all the plainer.

“ You give rise to the suspicion that throughout Europe you mean to attach Protestantism to your cause. And not for the advantage of a creed, but for your own glory. It was over such a matter that the Roman Empire perished, and now Holy Church must fall, that you may become master of the world. As this cannot lie in the scheme of things, and you know it—be warned. Let there be no reasons for that suspicion.”

At a protest from the King :

“ Who started that suspicion ? Why truly, hitherto it is I, and I alone, a priest, who understands how to be silent. Others hate you, without any clear notion of why they do so. I do not, as you are well aware ; I do not hate you. I am concerned for you. I have but to cite your own confession. One day you stood on the top of the Saint-Denis gate, and watched the Spaniards withdraw—not as vanquished enemies. Many of the victors climbed up to points of vantage to gloat upon that sight. But you exulted until you were near to fainting at the breach you had made in the order of the world. You speak of your kingdom : I know that words are always right, there are always bold men to bear a hand when there is a chance of degrading what has done good service. Your kingdom is like none other, you are transforming it into a nation : without the ranks and orders, that in essence know no frontiers, but have for centuries spread over all Christendom. You make men equal, and you call the result freedom. I was in Rouen with you when you held an assembly of the Estates of your Province of Normandy, but you gave the majority to the lowest Estate. Then you suborned, by offering them the power that is yours, in return for money ; all of which is called freedom. By the same token, an unruly and isolated kingdom is all the more lightly called—your Kingdom.”

Protests from the King. He too had friends in the

world. He loved his people, and they loved him. His peasants must not be slaves, nor must his industries be idle. He had encountered, not order, but its opposite : decay.

The Legate :

"Decay is a temporal matter, and does not affect the eternal order. What imperils you is public distrust. Here is a King who breaks, like a foreign element, into the ancient communion of universal monarchy. That universal entity mistrusts him. Peace—he will neither be able to keep it, nor will he be suffered to do so. The example of freedom and of self-government is most pernicious. It is an example that must be avoided, or it will spread ruin everywhere. Friends—the only friends you have are those who may not fear your example, or you would have none at all. Some are Republicans, and others Protestants, and many are both. You rely on Holland and on Switzerland. The unlucky Venetians are your admirers. In England an old Queen prolonged her life beyond the human term for your sake : and you yourself? "

"And I myself?" repeated Henri.

The Legate :

"After your departure, which may be near at hand, no more will be heard of the Edict that you have hitherto but promised to your Protestants. Even in this last hour I shall hope that you are not in earnest : For—your—own—sake."

"For my own sake," repeated Henri.

"It is for you that I am afraid."

A meaning silence fell, and the pair looked into each other's eyes. And Henri thought : This priest, who consorts with boys, knows much, but not enough.

"The time of my murderers is past," he said nonchalantly.

A pleading look came over the Legate's face. "Look at me," he said ; "I am not a friend to death, like many that I know."

And Henri said :

"To-day you will not find my would-be murderers among my people."

"Not to-day," repeated the Legate.

"Let us talk of this in ten years' time."

Which was an injudicious observation : the Legate was old, and did not care to be reminded of that fact. At this point the conversation ended.

They stood, and some while was spent in compliments from the Legate, assurances by the King, and all the formalities of farewell, the King attending his visitor to the door, thence back into the room and so once more towards the door, Henri again proffering his escort. It was noteworthy that the Legate most modestly refused to allow the King to accompany him so far. Now that the weightier and more perilous matters had been dismissed, the Legate took occasion to indulge in a little banter, or what indeed, from the way he spoke, might pass for such.

"You are in need of money, as is understandable enough. A king who would make all men equal, does best to make them all rich. Most unfortunately the money forces are on the side of the universal monarchy. Here you have but very inferior financiers, such as this man Zamet. He is an agent of the House of Medici, did you know? Though indeed there is little that you do not know."

"What is to be done?" said the King, very ready to drop his guard, now that the encounter was at an end. "I have two ways of getting my hands into the Grand Duke of Tuscany's exchequer ; by alliance, or by war."

He knew in fact that there was a third way ; and the Legate proceeded to mention it, with an air of mystery.

"The Grand Duke of Tuscany is not only a great banker ; he has a niece—with all the noble qualities of the Princesses of the House of Medici."

"I know," retorted Henri. "The noblest of them all kept me a prisoner here for many a year, and not a day passed that she did not eye me like a haunch of beef, to see if I were tender."

"Tut, tut, Your Majesty!" and such was the Legate's astonishment, that he barely smiled. "A great King likened to a joint of beef? Dear me! —not a matter to be mentioned. But what you call imprisonment may sometimes be fetters of roses."

The Legate had his hand on the door, having, rather surprisingly, reached it first; and he departed before any further outburst of courtesies. His motley escort wafted the little old gentleman out of sight in an instant.

And the King thought: All in all, the conversation pleased me better than my old friend Mornay's discourses on virtue.

The Legate in his cloud thought: The man is a martyr. Gladly would I write a new legend of the Saints. What was it that always marked our martyrs and our saints? The fear of death, without which no man can be a martyr. But what makes a man a saint is this, and only this—the impossible, the foul, abominable, infamous idea, that attacks the universal order and would overthrow it. Good health to those who will not be there, as I shall not be; and nor will he.

Henri closed the door with his own hand, for a while he paced to and fro, and wandered into the room nearby, that looked across to the window and the four shadows. Hitherto he had not been aware of them; he found himself reflecting that the Legate had for some while accompanied him everywhere. Had he been secretly present at the fireworks, when a dream of his had soared upwards with the rockets? Why, he had forgotten it himself; but the old man knew of it.

He laughed to himself. The shrewd priest was none the less deluded. . . . You see too deep, you are too suspicious. I have no mind to overthrow Pope and Emperor, and especially not for my convictions. These high thoughts are found on heights that I do not attempt to scale. You find your way alone, while I stay here below and do what must be done. And next of all I must marry my beloved, and make her my Queen.

Suddenly he clapped his hands to his sides. O the crazy things that a man had to do, before he could get into his marriage bed. The Edict ; because her party was Protestant. But before that, contrariwise, came the leap of death, for then we hoped to conciliate the Church and win the love of our Catholic subjects. But nothing was observable, except the knife that never found its mark.

As he was alone—which he now seldom was—he flung himself face downwards on the floor and groaned, that he might not shriek with laughter. Buffoon, be tragical ! Tragedian, make yourself ridiculous ! All for a woman ! World history in a bedroom. But it was something new to admit as much.

And yet, admitted, it was no longer true. Have a care ; Gabrielle is here much brought into question. She put heart into the King, she had borne him over obstacles, such as the death-leap, and the Edict ; and on the way there had been battles, men to be conciliated, much use of force and cunning, not to mention a great deal of honest toil. Had she died in childhood, how would matters stand ? There would still remain the Kingdom, and this man—who laughs no more, but clasps his face in his two hands. Lies prostrate on the floor, and must suffer sorely, because, for the first time in his life, he has his doubts of love. Ah, had it not been for love. . . . ! He lay quite still, and on his neck sat a malignant cripple, a thousand years old, who forced his head down with a vast broad gripping hand. Ah, had it not been for love. . . .

Henri shuddered so violently that the ancient creature lost his balance. Henri sprang to his feet. And he cried to the unseen incubus that had slipped off his back :

“ Not a Medici ! ”

He had spoken with such violence that the door opened, and his people appeared.

“ The whole Court,” he said, “ is to go over to the house of Madame, the sister of the King, and there wait upon the Duchess of Beaufort.”

GABRIELLE CONFESSES

From the table at which sat the four Protestant ladies, Madame, the King's sister, now lifted up her voice :

"I know little of sin, though I live outside wedlock. God is well aware why he permits it. I defy the world before it judges me, and I leave the rest to Him. It has been His will that I should abide by the Religion ; no matter what may come. I am abused by him I love, in ways that touch the soul—and also in other ways."

Here Catherine blushed, and eyed the others to see what was in their minds. And indeed they thought no harm. If Madame, the King's sister, had gone on to tell how the Count of Soissons betrayed her, or beat her, or threw her out of bed, these devout women would not have been perturbed. For loyalty in faith is in some sense a counterpart of humble constancy in love. That now ageing, girlish face claimed neither sympathy nor admiration. Knowing nothing of sin, it knew self-sacrifice. Catherine spoke again ; and said in her crystal tones :

"The King my brother wants me to marry another. He conceives me unhappy. Let him give us the Edict ! That would compensate for much and not least for my unhappiness. And if yet more were needed to make the balance good, let him set the Duchess of Beaufort beside him, she will bear him lovely children. I want the King to marry her, and I want the Edict—now I have said my say."

Madame, the King's sister, signed to the lady whom she had just named. Gabrielle had indeed been restored by what her good friend had said.

Gabrielle :

"Madame, the King's sister, has spoken truly : I shall bear lovely children to our lord : and many children. I aim at the throne, so I must needs hate anyone who thwarts me, and I especially hate the Queen of Navarre.

And yet I could more easily forgive her, if she plotted against my life, instead of that of my beloved lord. For truth's sake, I would uncover the worst of my heart ; but behind it all is my love for the King."

This touched them all. Catherine bent down a glowing face to Gabrielle, the Princess of Orange stroked her shoulder, poor Mornay lifted her clasped hands. Gabrielle bade them wait until she had finished :

"You do not know what it means to be wicked and worthless. A future Queen should not tell you of these things. For the honour of my lord I will keep silent. But there is a pride, an ambition, and a purpose, that are both false and vain. Had it not been for love—so you Protestants say. You in this room have surely never understood the meaning of those words : Had it not been for love. One, who does know, shudders at her past ; it belonged to a stranger whose spirit was distraught. I never possessed my life in all its fulness until I met with one for whom I would gladly die. I have won his heart, and I am forever his, no matter—believe me—whether he grows greater still, or whether he makes me his Queen."

"The time is at hand," said the Princess of Orange. But Gabrielle went on :

"Madame d'Orange, you need not fear that I shall show overmuch Christian resignation. I am resolved to attain my end, and I have not forgotten the lessons of my past. I'll give the Court good reason to call me evil names."

Duchess of Schweinsheim, thought the ladies. And oddly enough they did not conceive the title as a term of abuse. From her who now seemed so suddenly aloof came the voice of majesty ; she spoke out of the King's own rib, she was his very flesh and blood. No one now laid a glowing face to hers, nor thrilled at the vision of her beauty.

The Princess of Orange began, not waiting to be bidden :

"I go through life unaltered ; which is a great defect

in my nature. We ought to be burdened with faults, that we must cure by our wits and by our will. I had no faults of which to rid myself, neither ambition nor arrogance nor selfish purpose. The poor widow of Monsieur de Teligny became the wife of William of Orange, who might have married any rich Princess. He chose the poorest, when his enemies were already at his heels. His son by his first marriage, Maurice, held Holland in succession to his father. Unlike William, he did not want to see his country free, he meant to rule it, after throwing off the Spanish yoke. I am for Barneveldt, for justice and freedom, against my stepson Maurice, and against my own advantage, for my only boy would thus be heir to the throne. And all this would cost me nothing; there lies the blunder. I do not struggle, I make my way by a certain cheerful obstinacy, for which I get false credit as a virtue."

And she turned her cold clear eyes on the Duchess of Beaufort.

"Ignorance of the dark places of the soul marks, I think, indifference; and those who never err are not much regarded by our Lord in Heaven. I despise death, but that, I am sure, will not be counted in my favour. I do not die because I love, but because of that same Christian obstinacy that is my heritage. I was the favourite daughter of my father, Admiral Coligny."

The name was her last word. As she uttered it, the small, buxom Princess half rose out of her chair. The other three rose with her, and last of all Gabrielle. A nobleman whose entrance she had not observed, suddenly appeared before her, and bowed. She had scarcely expected this person in particular, and still less that he would so sacrifice his pride. It was Monsieur de Rosny, and he said:

"Madam, the King is on his way hither. It is his command that we should wait upon you. The Court is already assembled, and beseeches you to appear."

With Monsieur de Rosny at their head to marshal

them, the ladies walked two by two towards the great Audience Chamber ; and the buzz and clamour of the world about them soon dispelled the deeper mood in which they had revealed their inmost hearts. Gabrielle paused, and had almost turned and fled before the outburst of homage ; it was the first time she had been so greeted by the whole Court. They clapped their hands and cheered and bowed and curtsied, then with shuffling feet and rustling garments they pressed back to make way for her approach ; a hundred and more, thronging against the walls, she isolated in their midst. And in a shiver of fear at this ominous ovation she clutched Madame d'Orange's arm. Madame, the King's sister, stepped up to the left of her.

Madame de Mornay had fled. Outside, she said to the King, who was mounting the stairway :

"Sire ! The Duchess needs your help—— Oh make haste ! May you be in time, for I think your lady is in danger of her life !"

Henri began to run. Having reached the door of the hall, he saw—no angry throng besetting his beloved lady ; he saw her making a triumphant progress. His heart throbbed with joy, as he greeted Gabrielle's victory, and his own.

The great galleried hall, with a number of cabinets all round it, had—how long ago !—been the scene of the Ballet of the Magicians and the Barbers : and of that interlude when he and she had had to seek some refuge against the insults they could not stop ; how glad they had been to escape through the secret passage ! Those had been perilous moments for both. Since then—he had gone steadily upwards, and so had she. At last he had won a real victory over Spain, and he had even held his own against a Legate of the Pope. Now—now he knew himself strong enough to announce his Edict. And this day was her day—the day of his beloved lady. He had half a mind to compel the priest to marry them on the spot, and to proclaim her his Queen.

His mind was afire with expectancy. To others came the same thoughts in less vehement fashion. Two ladies, at a little distance from the throng, were whispering together :

The Princess of Conti : "How pale she is ! Madame d'Orange should hold her more firmly. I fear she may fall down."

The Princess of Condé, of the House of Bourbon : "There's more to fear than that. If only my cousin's luck holds ! He must needs be a great man for such a marriage."

The Princess of Conti : "Is he not great enough already to challenge us all now ? His precious whore displays herself to the whole Court, with a Protestant lady on either side of her. I believe she is a Protestant herself, or she would understand what threatens her, and faint sometimes for very fear of it."

The Princess of Condé : "Truly she is pale ; but her pallor may come from pride, not fear. If there is one pure woman at the Court, it is Madame d'Orange. She speaks well of Gabrielle d'Estrées, her new-found virtue, and the steadfast love that is to make her worthy of becoming Queen."

"All the worse for her own safety," said the first lady grimly, and the second lady agreed.

Then followed much hand-clapping and wild applause—while a certain gentleman, who had but lately appeared at Court, stood upon a chair and peered over the shoulders of the throng. "I must be mistaken," said this Monsieur de Bassompierre to those about him. "What I now see, cannot be reality, or someone will not live long."

Came a voice from below :

"Whom have you in mind ?"

"'Tis clear enough," said the gentleman on the chair. "The King must live. I grieve for this lovely lady, but the knife must otherwise be turned on him."

Said Madame de Sagonne :

"You have not been long among us, my poor friend,

and do not realize that our immediate future is cast under the constellation of Venus."

The Ministers, Villeroy and Rosny, were also caught in the throng. Each had gradually been edged against the wall, and there they met.

"A notable sight, my friend."

"It is indeed."

"It would be well—would it not?—that we should have seen nothing of the matter," said the Foreign Minister, whom the Minister of Finance knew to be a traitor. And Rosny answered :

"It is scarce worth remark. Nor need the Court of Madrid be informed of it. The affair will have no consequences. The King himself will forget it all, as soon as he needs money again. His Grand Treasurer, or his mistress—only the fools of this Court could doubt which of the two will prevail. There need be no talk of murder or of death, a money-box strikes harder than an axe."

Whereupon Monsieur de Rosny allowed himself to be jostled away from Monsicur de Villeroy, whom he knew to be a traitor. His words, however much or little he believed in them himself, were spoken with the intention of assuring Gabrielle's safety. He did not like her, nor was he a kindly man. But he had a sense of dignity, and honoured the vital forces that had so striven to bring forth that great reign, which he conceived in three embodiments : The King, himself, and the Duchess of Beaufort. But the woman should never go beyond that rank and title : he would take good care of that.

Gabrielle stood up, and she faced the Court and her own glory, for what seemed an eternity—though it was but a few minutes by the clock. She sighed when her dear lord took her hand and led her through the hall. The crowd began to move, the broken ranks were formed again, and all stood eager for a word of recognition when the King should pass. They watched the King's lips, and, no less intently, the rich lips of his lady, who, with poised

fingers touching his, walked a step or two ahead. He, behind the broad flat panniers of her dress, seemed to be displaying her to that company as his jewel and his treasure, and doing so with zest : and indeed there was an imperious air about him in that moment, as they all observed.

So Gabrielle encountered none but submissive looks. The colour came back into her cheeks, and she herself, instead of the King, spoke to the bystanders on either side. It was the touch of her finger-tips upon his, that steadied her, and told her what to say. She did indeed pass the first few courtiers in silence ; but before Monsieur de Sancy, Captain of the Swiss, she paused :

"Monsieur de Sancy, the King and I have decided to go into Brittany. I give you my permission to accompany us."

This she said to several others, especially to Monsieur de Bouillon, who had thought it well to ignore his defection before Amiens. Wherefore he bowed respectfully when the lady he had tried to bribe, commanded rather than invited his presence on this journey.

Towards the end of her progress Gabrielle came face to face with Monsieur de Rosny. Both tall and fair, their skin and eyes of kindred colouring : they might have passed for brother and sister. But only in outward aspect, and the spectators did not view them so, for there was little in common between the charming d'Estrées, and a grim figure hewn from stone. And indeed the pair felt no kinship. Gabrielle held up her head, and spoke more haughtily than to the rest :

"You will have to leave your Arsenal, and travel in my escort, Monsieur de Rosny."

His face flushed deeply, he gasped, and then he answered :

"I await my master's command."

"The Duchess asks you to attend her," said Henri, and his finger-tips warned her to repeat his words.

She did so, But it was too late.

A TREATY OF MARRIAGE

The King's journey into Brittany proved a peaceful progress, although he took with him ten thousand infantry, apart from horses and guns. This escort, which was indeed considerable for an ordinary visit, had been urged upon him by his Grand Master of Artillery. Henri had listened while he said, what he himself knew but hated to admit, that without the threat of force he could not even now have won his Province. Another matter, too, he had not foreseen ; the necessity for speed. Monsieur de Rosny insisted, and indeed with good reason, that the Duke of Mercœur would only abandon his shifts and subterfuges, if he found himself caught unprepared.

That was the reason Rosny gave. The one he did not give, concerned the King's beloved, who could not travel on the day appointed ; the expected child had exhausted her of late. So Monsieur de Rosny did not travel in her train, as she had intended. He rode away ; and she was left behind, prostrate. Three days later she set out. When Gabrielle had reached Angers by easy stages, Henri with his great array was already far ahead. Wherever he approached, the cities of his Province of Brittany opened their gates to him ; and from all over that sea-girt peninsula, the noblemen made haste to offer a welcome to their King. Monsieur de Mercœur in his craggy lair had grown too confident in the might of the unharnessed sea. King Henri haled him out of his wind-swept fortress. It was spring, and the storms were raging with more than common fury : that wild lord of storms had to be content to sit upon dry land, where his power soon ebbed away from him, and he had to sign the treaty.

It was indeed no special treaty providing for the abdication of his sovereignty. It was rather the return of a great Province to the King's authority, though, as it were by chance, connected with another pact that was to prove

of yet greater import : a contract of marriage. The daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Mercœur was to marry Cæsar Vendôme, son of the King of France and the Lady Gabrielle d'Estrées. This ranked as the main event, if not in the eyes of everyone, all the more surely in those of Gabrielle. It was on this account that she had been so set upon this journey. Delays and obstacles exasperated her into behaviour that seemed quite out of character in so placid a beauty.

The Duchess of Mercœur, Marie of Luxembourg, of the House of Penthievre was a great lady who thought a d'Estrées far beneath her. Moreover, the boy Cæsar was born of a double adultery, and she scorned the proposed alliance into which she was to enter. A King of France was not a connection that she wanted, when, like this King, he had made his own way to the throne. And who could predict his future and the succession ? It would be disputed forthwith, if the knife reached its mark at last. A King's bastard for a son-in-law—— ! And Madame de Mercœur, always a ready intriguer, began to plot and plan against this match. Gabrielle resolved to clinch the matter. When the Duchess of Mercœur appeared before Angers, intent upon further procrastination, Gabrielle had all the gates barred. The great lady had to turn back, and possess herself in patient humiliation, until the King came, and at his instance she was received back into favour. Many people do not realize how precariously they stand until a gate is slammed in their faces.

In the interval, Henri had been to Rennes, where the Estates of the Province of Brittany were holding their assembly. As he would not see his lady for a few days, he wrote her letters as at the time of their courtship. Indeed they were very like those he used to send to the Château of Cœuvres, several of which were intercepted by the enemy, who could very easily have caught the little old peasant with the blackened face. And Henri thought : ' Seven years gone, and always I and you. Is it then true what you reproach me with, and I deny ; that you now

love the more ? 'That you love me a thousand-fold more than I love you. So much at least is certain ; your face has bloomed and ripened, like your heart. You would no longer endure to live without me, that I can well believe, for you could not go back to the life you have left behind. But I, my dearest treasure, am in no different case, and am no more free than you. My fortunes rose with yours, with you I entered upon my possessions—and indeed I possess nothing that is not in and through you mine. I view my kingdom in the semblance of your womb—which betrayed me often in past days, but now belongs to me. And though your beauty faded, I could not leave you. Time was when I took back my love ; very poor I was, who am now rich.'

There was nothing of all this in his letters, which were still carried by La Varenne. But he kept the light, brisk style of his former letters, with allusions to the weapons that his lady herself had chosen, with which the contest very soon be decided. Thus the King wrote, when the speeches in the Brittany assembly grew too wearisome ; the last Province of his kingdom that he made his own.

He said nothing either about the strange events that always seemed to break in upon his more rational dealings, and did so now. They would have upset a highly normal and vivacious lady, and a father's encounters with the abnormal might well have marked an unborn child. When his business with the Estates was ended, he stayed for a day and a night at Saumur, the city of his old comrade, Philip Mornay, who in secular matters had always been both sane and lucid. Much brooding upon theological mysteries may have weakened his sense of reality ; but he now saw Monsieur de Saint Phal everywhere.

"What is the matter with you ?" Henri asked. And an emaciated, shrunken Mornay answered in a toneless voice :

"He looked in through the window just now : he mocks me, and insults me."

"Come hither, friend," said Henri. "You are in your

castle, which you fortified. How could he get inside it ; and how would he get out ? ”

“ One who is in league with the devil ”—and a far-away look came over the man’s twitching face : “ heeds no walls nor lifted draw-bridges.”

“ And where could he have gone to ground ? ” asked Henri.

“ There,” said Mornay in a whisper, and he promptly laid a trembling forefinger at a particular spot on the large wall map.

And Henri, merely thinking how to get out quickest : “ Make haste,” said he : “ Let us be after him ! ”

The wretched man dropped his arms and bowed his head and wailed :

“ The Devil warns him when I try to track him down. Sire ! I have your word. You must catch this man.”

“ You have my word,” cried Henri, as he dashed through the door.

He mounted, and rode off with escort enough to have captured a whole band of marauders. The horsemen pulled up at the forest edge, where a house in a patch of marshy ground looked like the refuge of Saint Phal. Meantime the King was lured aside to follow the hoof-marks of a stag, and lost sight of his companions. The forest grew so thick that Henri had to dismount, he could not tell from what direction came the huntsmen’s answering shouts ; and night began to fall.

By chance he fell in with three of his gentlemen in the darkness, one of them being de Thou, President of the High Court. Already getting on in years, he had accompanied the King on his journey to take part in the negotiations with Mercœur. While in pursuit of the stag, he had fallen from his horse, and injured his leg. The King decided that he could not leave him alone, despite the President’s plea that the King should return to Saumur.

“ How can I ? We have lost our way,” said Henri. In the interval, one of the others had climbed a tree and reported that he could see a light. When they reached

the place, progressing very slowly owing to Monsieur de Thou's injury, there lay a solitary house in a marsh. They made their way to it, the door was unlocked, and all the rooms empty. In the one where the light was burning, there stood a bed prepared.

"Aha," said Bellegarde. "He has been here. He was going to bed when we surprised him, he cannot be far away."

"Then fetch him, Feuilemorte," said Henri, and looked as though he thought it was so.

The Grand Master of the Horse and the third gentleman made a great clatter in that shadowy house, which began to feel uncanny. Then they departed, splashing their way through the swamp. In the meantime the King urged Monsieur de Thou to lie down; but there was not a bed in the place save the one already observed. The President of the High Court refused; the King must have it. However, he was in such pain that he consented to stretch himself out on the very edge of it, though in the King's presence he would not take the shoe off his injured foot. Henri sat in the only chair before the chimney-piece, in which lay a small heap of wood. He kindled some pine cones, lit the fire, and stared into it wide-eyed. Half vacantly he fell to pondering on this journey into his Province of Brittany: with the purpose of entering into weighty state negotiations, after much patient and sagacious preparation. And here he was in pursuit of a delusion—and not even a delusion of his own. He would be all the less likely to escape that night from the forest and a desolate house, with its one solitary burning taper. If murderers had broken in on him, he had no support but a sick man, and his own sword. . . . How precarious was human reason. All the strange things that had befallen him passed in a vision before his mind, surely they should have been warnings from his uncompleted nature to itself. —A man must never shrink from his own knowledge, he must do heartily what in him lies and what is laid upon him: well (thought Henri), if he had, he would not be

sitting here, and would escape yet darker magic in the future.

All this could be learned by staring into the flickering flames. . . . Tarry no longer, make the one woman your Queen. . . . He saw her name written in the fire, and heard it in the crackling of the flames.

Bellegarde and his friend reappeared, noiselessly this time, for they had bared their legs above the knee, to wade through the swamp. They assured him they had seen Monsieur de Saint Phal leaping through the rustling undergrowth, until he had at last fallen into a pit. Henri merely asked them to see to the poor President, who had fallen on the bed from sheer exhaustion, and was now asleep, undress him, and dispose him comfortably. After so doing, they conducted the King to a room with one door only, the floor of which was strewn with straw. They left the door open, and each leaned against the outer face of each door-post. Any intruder would have to force his way between them.

Henri promptly fell into a deep sleep. His two guards now and again shifted their legs beneath their cloaks, to make sure that the other was awake. But at last not a limb stirred—until a piercing cry for help shook them from their dreams. They first thought they were still in the forest and had stumbled into Monsieur de Saint Phal, who was shrieking with terror. Then they remembered Monsieur de Thou.

The old President had suddenly become aware of a lunatic girl in his room. The poor creature had been so sadly abused in the city, that she had taken refuge in the deserted house, from which she would indeed have fled had she known that strangers were in occupation. But she did not. She came back as usual, took her wet clothes off in the dark—the taper had long since guttered out—and hung them over the chair by the hearth, in which there was still a faint glow. When her shift was partly dry, she lay down across the bed, at the sleeper's feet, and was soon asleep herself. It was not long before Monsieur

de Thou turned over ; in doing so he pushed the girl off the bed, and so hurt his injured leg as he did so, that he awoke.

De Thou pulled the bed curtain, and saw a white form moving in the faint glimmer from the window. It could not be a phantasm, for she approached and looked at him. "Who are you?" asked the President. "The Queen of Heaven," replied the presence. The President knew this must be blasphemous nonsense ; he was seized by a superstitious terror, and shouted for help. The gentlemen came to his rescue, and locked the girl into another room.

Henri had slept on, and heard nothing of all this until the day was up, and the four of them were riding to Saumur. He merely said that in the President's place he would have been terrified, and then fell silent. But he thought of his own self-questioning beside the fire : the fire in which he had read, and whose voice he had heard. Not long afterwards, at the Easter celebrations, when the choir began the *Regina Coeli Laetare*, the King stood up, and looked about the church for Monsieur de Thou.

Such were the more mysterious happenings, assuming, indeed, that the sense of them was not understood. No mention was made of them in the letters to Gabrielle. Henri, on his way back to her, fell in with the Duchess of Mercœur ; never before had he received such homage and such obsequious assurances from so exalted a personage. He felt all the more suspicious, as he did not yet know that his dear mistress had tamed the lady. He invited her to accompany him to Angers. There were many towers in the castle there—the Duchess of Mercœur counted sixteen or more—and she feared that in one or other of them she might be very safely lodged. And the broad circling walls bristled with her enemy's guards.

Before they arrived, the Duchess of Beaufort came forth to meet them, and was all eagerness to embrace the lady ; indeed she invited her into her litter. Henri admired Gabrielle for having so learned to dispose her

feelings, and hold fast to her purpose. And this lovely lady was yet more esteemed for wisdom and sagacity when at last, on the thirty-first of March, the all-important treaty was signed : a treaty of State under the guise of a marriage contract.

In the castle of Angers, the Royal Notary, Master Guillot, read the deed, and long as it was, the brilliant assemblage listened with all their ears. The Duke and the Duchess of Mercœur bestowed on their daughter Françoise, upon her marriage to Duke Cæsar of Vendôme, a magnificent dowry in money and jewels ; all, incidentally, bought out of the vast sum which the Duke of Mercœur received from the King for his Province of Brittany.

At this, many of the spectators could contain themselves no longer. They knew the purport of this pact.

"We knew it," said the Cardinal de Joyeuse to the Protestant, Bouillon, "but we did not believe it. The House of Lorraine is giving up the last vestige of its power. Little Navarre is now master of the kingdom."

"But not of my dukedom of Bouillon," replied the former Monsieur de Turenne, who had inherited the same, and thought to maintain himself against the King ; an ambition which was to be the ruin of him.

Master Guillot announced that the Governors and magistrates of the Province of Brittany would be left in possession of their offices. At this point came a snort of anger ; from Monsieur de Rosny, his face, as usual, a mask of stone, but inwardly infuriated. Notorious rascals and traitors were to continue as they were instead of answering for their transgressions ; he had been helpless to prevent it. The Royal power, as embodied in justice, had been humiliated ; and Rosny, who had so striven in its defence, told himself that the King was weak. He who never yielded, could not understand that power may yield. A marriage contract as a cover for a treaty—Rosny merely sneered, and ascribed the whole matter to the ambition of a mistress, who had managed to prevail upon the King.

One Monsieur de Bassompierre, a new arrival at the

Court, asked what Madame, the King's sister, had to do with the affair. She had been summoned to the ceremony, and her consent had been requested. "Ah," said the newcomer, "now all is clear. The King's purpose is to give the Protestants their Edict. What we now see, is the first step to that end."

Suddenly the Notary's voice was still, deep silence fell upon the assemblage ; then came the rustle of two dresses. One of lilac silk, the other green, brocaded with silver ; Madame, the King's sister, and the Duchess of Beaufort. Between them, the King ; thus the three of them proceeded up the room to the table on which the treaty was laid out. Two names were then called, the Duke and Duchess of Mercœur came forward ; and others, who were also to sign, took their places. The group stood isolated upon a dais, and up the steps of it now climbed two children, a boy and a girl, arrayed like their elders. Walking with measured gait, the two little figures stopped and stood in the most dignified of attitudes, and their faces were the gravest in all that company.

Some, who had been looking wryly at the performance, broke into smiles. Not a few of the ladies uttered little cries of delight, or sighed aloud in something like relief. Henri watched the faces of the two Mercœurs, whom he was stripping of their possessions and their power. Hitherto they had looked like detected criminals, their colour came and went, the man's eyes reddened, and the woman coughed, that she might not weep nor shriek. But when the children took their stand on the dais, the pair's demeanour changed. They grasped their share in this event. . . . Their daughter would be but one step from the throne. The boy would ascend it with her. The King must marry the mother. If he would but marry her at once !

The King signed first, and gave the pen to the Duchess of Beaufort. Her hand was trembling, but with joy. All the spectators craned their heads to see. The loveliest hand in the kingdom traced the most exalted signature that had yet been hers. She laid down the pen and waited,

with throbbing heart. Her dear lord smiled a reassuring smile. Scarcely had Madame, the King's sister, set down her name, than the two Mercœurs hurried to the table. Philip Emmanuel of Lorraine, Duke of Mercœur, Marie of Luxembourg, Duchess of Mercœur : Gabrielle read the names with shining eyes, her joy made her dizzy. Beneath the burden of it, she bent her head on the shoulder of her beloved, who kissed her flushed face.

The witnesses passed the goose-quill from one to another, and not the least important was Monsieur Antoine d'Estrées, father of that day's heroine, who had long since shed his blemished reputation. Thereupon, without loss of time, the betrothal of the children was solemnized by the Cardinal de Joyeuse, in the presence of the Court and the foreign envoys. But there were none among that company whose hearts were stirred a second time, or were diverted from the issue, by the sight of children taking part in a ceremony beyond their years. One clause of the contract was indeed most present to their minds. When the Notary had read it out in clear, emphatic tones, they made no sign that they had marked it, or pretended that it was of small account. If, in time to come, one of the future spouses did not wish to consummate the marriage, he or she had simply to denounce it, at a price—and not a high one for wealthy families.

"This means nothing," said the Grand Master of the Horse, Bellegarde, in a tone of astonishment. "It will be fourteen years before they are ripe."

"I fancy my niece, the Duchess of Beaufort, ripened somewhat earlier?" retorted a lady at his side.

Bellegarde caught a view of Gabrielle, though he was not looking out for her; and, to avoid her eyes, he dropped his own. His heart thrilled with memories. "Look at her," he heard a voice beside him say. A word had cut short his happiness, he thought, though he had years of prosperity ahead of him. Had he not provoked it, there would have been here no King's son to betroth. One word, and youth and happiness are gone.

"What she was destined to be, that she has become," he said softly.

"And we never guessed it," sighed Madame de Sourdis, —and would herself gladly have forgotten her efforts that Gabrielle's destiny might be fulfilled.

Bellegarde eyed the children. Little Vendôme had developed too quickly, he was fat and lumpish ; Bellegarde did not like the look of him. But his heart, and his alone, was once more touched. Poor lad, he said to himself. This meant nothing. The end of that song was not yet known.

THE EDICT

The festivities in honour of the great Treaty, in which so vast a company took part, were in one respect a disappointment. The loveliest of ladies could not be present. Her condition no longer permitted of any public appearance. As soon as the King could accompany her, they both set out for the city of Nantes, and there she bore him his second son, Alexander. After Cæsar, Alexander, and he was given the title of Monsieur, as though he were a son of France.

The city and castle of Nantes then for the first time came over to the Royal party. And as Alexander-Monsieur was born to him promptly after his arrival, King Henri signed the Edict of Nantes,—in a flush of paternal joy. So it appeared, nor was the matter called in question. But shortly before that event, came the pact whereby the betrothal of the two children included and glossed over the recovery of his last Province—by a well considered stroke. Those who might have protested, were silent, they merely asked themselves—how long ! Now we move into another room, and sign the Edict of Nantes.

"Well," said the Catholic gentlemen to each other, "this is where the King would have us. We are beaten."

The Cardinal de Joyeuse : "He grants freedom of

conscience. This is his day of fulfilment. Is he now the Huguenot that he was? Or has he come to believe nothing at all?"

The Constable de Montmorency: "He calls me his godfather. But he is not the man I knew."

The Cardinal: "In days gone by at Coutras he defeated and killed my two brothers. I cannot be his friend. I admire his obstinacy."

The Constable: "Do we desire the greatness of this kingdom? It was only at the price of freedom of conscience that we made a conqueror's peace at Vervins. What else his purpose is, I do not know."

The Cardinal: "Freedom of conscience: if we thought solely as Christians, and had not to provide for this world, as does our Holy Church, it should be granted. But we must provide for this world, if we are to survive."

The Constable: "He means to survive, that is very sure. He calls his Edict unassailable."

The Cardinal: "It is no more and no less so than himself."

Here the Cardinal turned his open hand and held it back upwards. The Constable understood; beneath it lay a man, overthrown.

"We are beaten," said the Catholics, though some indeed thought it without saying so. "The King has liberated heresy—if only that were all! Your strong places are in Protestant hands. Where are ours?" they asked a Protestant, one of their opponents who in the thronged room had been caught in his adversaries' ranks. Creeds had latterly been ignored. To-day the Religions stood sundered.

"You may now hold your services in many Catholic cities; but we may not do so in yours. You are granted all civil rights, you may hold office, you may even become magistrates."

"And you?" retorted Agrippa over several intervening heads. "Who were they who shed their blood for the King?—and if we live, it is small credit to ourselves. I

know some who meant to bring this State to ruin, arm in arm with the Spaniards. Our good swords won the King his sovereignty ; and who now claims to control the offices of State, and the Treasury ? Those who betrayed him, and would betray him again."

The word "betray" was almost shouted by Agrippa ; there had been a good deal of recrimination, but voices were not raised ; the King was issuing his Edict. But the gentlemen at whom the word was aimed, would gladly have taught him a lesson. However, bold Agrippa's short stature saved him, for he was concealed behind the taller Protestants, and they thrust him backwards until he was out of sight.

Among the Protestants, Marshal de Roquelaure said to Monsieur Philip du Plessis Mornay : "You look as though you had taken a black draught. Isn't this our joyful day ?"

"So we called the day of Coutras," said Mornay. "In those days we were the army of the poor. The army of those persecuted for righteousness' sake."

Roquelaure : "Our King had hollow cheeks, I see him still."

Mornay : "You need but to turn towards him now, his cheeks are still hollow, his battle is not ended." Mornay would have liked to add : 'And I am at mortal odds with Monsieur de Saint Phal. Nay worse : when my Tractate on the Mass appears, I shall lose the favour of the King.' The Marshal interrupted him :

Roquelaure : "The King to-day fulfils his promised word, but he goes no further. We should have held the first places in the State ; we are now given the rights of tolerance, but no warrant that our position will endure. For forty long years we have fought for freedom of conscience !"

Mornay : "It is achieved, and once for all. The King speaks truth." But Mornay thought : 'Freedom of conscience is a spiritual possession. Times will come when we can preserve it only in our hearts, and in exile.'

Upon the two Protestants a strange silence fell, while thoughts that shun utterance passed across their vision. And Roquelaure said at last :

"In old days, when the kingdom was not his, and he was not yet great, he and we broke crusts together, and prayed : All the heathen encompass me, but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. Who is now destroyed ? Indeed, it would be to no purpose. There is little profit in promises redeemed." So, with a rueful air, said Monsieur de Roquelaure, who was known at the Court for his love of laughter and light-hearted mockery.

And Philip Mornay, a self-tormentor, answered ; but the two men would not meet each other's eyes :

"One should not grow old. Here is one who grows not old." He turned and faced his master, whom he had chosen in the days of his youth.

King Henri, on the dais, beneath the baldachin, pronounced his Edict. He had no notary to read it ; he recited it from memory, as his will and his good pleasure. His tone was nicely balanced between conciliation and command, and in the sound of his own voice he might well have forgotten what, as he stood beneath this baldachin, were the rights that he was in fact restoring : no more than half a settlement, mutilated, and delayed until the eleventh hour. The negotiations and concessions had been a mockery ; and he thought of all the wrangling, the ruptures and renewals, the fair speeches that did but mask the evil intrigues, the bitterness and hatred, the incarnate lust for gain : much indeed had gone to make that Edict. His twenty years of war as well. A petty King of Navarre, uncertain of his life and of the throne of France, he had had this distant day before his eyes. Another of his usual appearances beneath a baldachin, and the Edict was a matter of small account ; and yet the kingdom was more than money and possession, more than the common power over his fellow-men. At last he knew himself strong enough to say to them : ' You are to be free to believe and to think.' And he wished that there had been present to hear him

one, whose eyes and ears were already stopped with earth. Monsieur Michel de Montaigne ; they had talked together once by the seashore. What do I know ?—was his favourite phrase. They had caroused together in a cottage wrecked by cannon, they had chanted Horace—Montaigne and his most insignificant disciple, who now stood beneath the baldachin and announced his Edict. Montaigne would be glad ; as he himself was glad.

He was the only one present who felt any satisfaction, as he did not fail to mark. Neither party was pleased, they merely accepted what he granted, because he was strong enough at last : freedom of conscience, with all its consequences. From every side they stared up at him on his dais, as though majesty alone sufficed to transform the community, and there had been no vicissitudes of war and peace before that day. And Henri thought : Long labour, dubious success, brief joy. He would be brief and make an end, before they were overcome by astonishment. The betrothal of the children, the birth of his son—that is what they were there to celebrate ; from mere joy of fatherhood he was to make them equal, he would strip the nobles of their provinces and power. Within the State, creeds no longer parted them, and rank should not divide them soon. Give not too close an ear, we will be brief.

“ I assign the Protestants of my kingdom to ten districts, of which each shall govern itself through deputies : two pastors, four burghers and farmers, four noblemen. Their petitions and disputes, I shall myself decide.”

The King had spoken. He took the parchment from the hands of his Chancellor, old Cheverny, signed it, and saluted the assemblage before turning to depart. Now they have it, thought Henri. They will need much charity and forbearance to grow used to what they have.

Most of the company merely stared at the King. Some, who had understood, whispered to each other :

“ Four noblemen against six of the Third Estate. He is beginning with the Protestants.”

"That means democracy."

"Or despotism."

As Henri passed the doorway, there were cheers of
"Long live the King !"

But he departed, as though the cheers were meant for
someone else.

